The Omaha Suburban Park
Master Plan Update 2016
Omaha Suburban Park Master Plan
Update 2016

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Prepared for the Department of Parks, Recreation and Public Property
by Vireo

Economic Analysis conducted by HDR, Inc.

Adopted by the Omaha City Council

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Part I:

Narrative

A MASTER PLAN FOR THE OMAHA SUBURBAN PARK SYSTEM

In February of 2001, the Omaha City Council approved a long-term vision for park development in the city’s outer fringes. The “Master Plan for the Omaha Suburban Park System” has guided the growth of parks, boulevards, trails and open space since that time. The Plan outlines general locations, facilities, costs and in the case of boulevards, design criteria for the acquisition and development of these services.

Periodic updates of the Suburban Park Plan are called out in the original master plan document. Updates are based on reviewing the successes and weaknesses of the plan and refine specific policies for improvements. It was recommended that future updates occur every three years, concurrently with the Interceptor Sanitary Sewer Plan update, in order to coordinate these two closely related efforts.

Omaha’s Suburban Park Plan is composed of four companion elements.

1. The Map
2. Master Plan Document
Since 2001, the “A Master Plan for the Omaha Suburban Park” has been used extensively by both the public and private sectors to help guide the growth of park and open spaces in suburban Omaha.

The main purpose of this 2016 plan update is to make revisions which coincide with recent development activities and jurisdictional changes and to reconfirm level of service standards through public and stakeholder outreach. There are no wholesale changes to the goals and principles of this plan.

This 2016 master plan updated includes several major undertakings. The “Locator Map”, illustrating the location of all parks, trails, boulevards and environmental resources was revised to reflect changes in the city’s jurisdictional boundaries due to annexations. The revised map also shows parks, trails and boulevards completed since the original plan was developed.

The “Park Sites and Descriptions”, found in Appendix C, includes minor updates and/or revisions to descriptions and matrices. Characteristics of the proposed sites are described for purposes of locating the parks properly. This section of the plan also includes parks that are partially or totally completed since the 2001 plan, along with any sites that have been eliminated from the plan.
The “Park Facilities Development and Costs” section was revised to reflect changes in the “Park Sites and Descriptions”. It not only specifies what facilities and acreage are programmed for each park, but it also provides a statement of probable cost for park development to serve as a guideline for developers and city staff. This section comprises Appendix D of this document.

Finally, the funding mechanism employed to implement the plan was closely scrutinized. In the 2010 update the funding portions of the master plan were significantly changed to address unbalanced expenditures and revenues collected by park fees. In the current update economists at HDR, Inc. were retained to provide an in-depth analysis and verify the changes have addressed this problem.
PLANNING PROCESS

As part of the 2016 Update, stakeholders and the public were engaged in the process to evaluate the community’s preferences for park facility types and discuss how the current park system master plan is performing. A series of workshops and input meetings were held to engage user groups including:

- Recreation Stakeholders (softball, baseball and cricket were present; invited but not present: football, soccer, lacrosse)
- Community Stakeholders (developers, planners, engineers, fiscal agents, and city officials)
- Public Stakeholders (residents, school officials and interested persons in the suburban area)
- City Staff (including representatives from Parks Department, Public Works, Planning, and Finance)

Input received was used to evaluate future park facilities, funding policies and procedures, and level of service of each park type.
Part II:
Plan Analysis

As part of the 2016 update, the current Suburban Park Master Plan was analyzed to ensure consistency between similar planning efforts and national standards.

REVIEW SUMMARY OF OMAHA MASTER PLAN - PARK ELEMENT

In order to ensure a unified planning process for the suburban park system, this plan must be in concert with the current City of Omaha Master Plan. The 1995 Park Element of the Omaha Master Plan was reviewed for consistency in planning principles with those of this Suburban Park System Master Plan Update 2016. In general, the vision, goals and objectives of the ‘Parks and Recreation Element’ are compatible with the planning principles of this plan. However, a detailed narrative updating, clarifying or augmenting certain sections of the Park Element for consistency with this plan is provided here.
LEVEL OF SERVICE ANALYSIS

The original 2001 Omaha Suburban Park System Master Plan utilized a systematic process to determine a proposed level of service for locating new parks and facilities. Employing a methodology that combined a statistically valid phone survey with input gained from the public and community stakeholders, it was determined that a ½ mile (10-15 minute walk) was an acceptable service radius for a neighborhood park. To facilitate an equivalent level of service across the region, neighborhood parks were sited in the approximate center of each land section (one mile grid). The majority of parks were linked via trails, greenways and/or boulevards to form a unified system of greenspaces as was envisioned by H.W.S. Cleveland in his 1889 parks master plan for eastern and central Omaha.

An analysis of the existing park system informed which active-use facilities would be contained within this linked system of neighborhood parks. The end goal was to establish equity of service and a high level of accessibility. Facilities analyzed included basketball and tennis courts, land set aside for active use and off street parking. An existing number of such facilities per 1000 persons was then determined. This level of amenity service per 1000 in projected population was applied to the undeveloped land within the jurisdictional limits of suburban Omaha. As a result these ‘Type B’ neighborhood parks were distributed in a fairly even pattern to form a continuous level of service across the network of parks.

For the purposes of this 2016 updated Omaha Suburban Park System Master Plan, it was necessary to confirm the conclusions of the original 2001 level of service analysis. To accomplish this, suburban parks built since 2001 were inventoried using Vireo’s proprietary, web-based mobile application called Site Capture for Parks. This program allowed the inventory to be conducted in the field real time on a mobile platform. The inventory collected information about the overall condition of the park itself and the overall condition of the amenities within each park.
The overall condition of a park was a product of its visual appeal, safety and accessibility. In all, 10 criteria were inventoried, assigned a weight and totaled to arrive at an overall “score” for each park. Based upon the overall park score, the level of service for each park was mapped using 1/2 mile radius for high performing parks, 1/4 mile for good performing parks and a 1/8 of a mile for fair performing parks. Given that the parks included in this inventory are all relatively new and well maintained, all but two of the parks analyzed received a “high performance” rating, thereby providing a one-half mile service radius for most neighborhood parks.

Next the condition of each park’s amenities was inventoried and ranked using a system of excellent, good, fair and poor. Each amenity’s level of service was mapped using 1/3 mile for excellent, 1/4 for good, 1/5 mile for fair and 0 mile for poor. The principle at play here is that the better the condition of the amenity, the further a user would be willing to travel or walk to use a particular park amenity. Again, since all the parks inventoried are relatively new and facilities are well maintained, all but a handful of park amenities received an “excellent” rating.

The overall park scores and amenity scores were overlaid atop one another in the field analysis to generate a composite level of service boundary that ultimately validated the approximate one-half mile service radius for each new neighborhood park. This methodology supported the current level of service standard established by the original Suburban Park System Master Plan that one neighborhood park per square mile will meet the public’s desire for convenient and accessible park facilities. This assumes, of course, that new developments provide appropriate walkable linkages to these parks in the form of sidewalks and trails. Furthermore, amenities within these future neighborhood parks will provide an equitable level of service between the incorporated and non-incorporated residents of Omaha. Not sure how this confirms how far a person is willing to walk to a park without asking users of a wide range of park facilities and conditions.
Part III: Implementation

Policies and Procedures
This section of the Plan describes a system of policies and procedures to guide the implementation of the Suburban Master Park Plan.

UTILIZING THE SID FINANCING METHOD
Historically, an important part of the City of Omaha’s analysis of proposed developments and subdivision plats is the evaluation of park-related needs. The Suburban Park Plan guides this review. For those developments in which parks, trails or boulevards/parkways are indicated in the Plan, the Sanitary & Improvement District (SID) financing mechanism may be authorized to purchase this property and develop the associated recreational facilities. The policies and procedures governing this process are as follows:

Parks
1. City approval is required and shall include approvals from the Park & Recreation Advisory Board, the Planning Board and the Omaha City Council.
2. Acquisition expenditures are restricted as follows:
   a. **Maximum Per Acre Payment** - the purchase price shall not exceed the per-acre, raw land price paid for the entire area being preliminary platted.
   b. **Floodway Property** - should a park include floodway land, no reimbursement for the acquisition of this property will be approved. This property shall be donated.
   c. **Floodplain Property** - payment for property, within designated flood-plain and proposed for acquisition within a Suburban park, shall not exceed 50% of the full per acre raw land price.
   d. **Wetlands** - wetlands property, when contained within a Suburban Park, shall be donated without reimbursement.
e. **Easements** – occasionally portions of park property being purchased may be formally encumbered with easements. These include easements for sewer lines, gas lines, power lines and others. Property restricted by these easements shall be donated without compensation.

f. **Post-Construction Stormwater Practices** – if any post-construction stormwater best management practices are proposed, these practices shall be located in public outlots or easements and designated as such on the plat and in the subdivision agreement. Said outlots and easements shall not be considered as part of this plan.

g. **Street Frontage** – all parks shall have a minimum of 35% of their perimeter adjoining streets. Expenditures associated with one-half the width of the street pavement and any sidewalk associated with the street frontage of a park may be general obligation expenditures of the District.

h. **Soft Costs** – soft costs, associated with the acquisition of parkland may be paid by the SID and shall not exceed 20%.

i. **Open Drainage Ways** – open drainage areas may be included within a park. These lands will be donated at no charge and shall be determined by the greater of the 3:1 plus 20, 3:1 plus 50 on larger tributaries feet or the passing of the 100-year storm.

3. Development of recreational facilities identified in the Plan:

a. **Facilities Program.** The Plan specifies the facilities to be included in each Park, Trail, Boulevard, and Cultural/Historic Area. SID expenditures shall be limited to these specific facilities unless changes are authorized during the development of the Park Plan.

b. **Park Master Plan.** Neighborhood Parks being developed through direct SID financing shall begin this process with the creation of a Park Master Plan. A Registered Landscape Architect shall develop this plan with
direction provided by the Department of Parks, Recreation and Public Property (PRPP). The PRPP reserves the right to conduct all design and construction administrative activities with Park Planning staff in lieu of a designer retained by an SID. Each Park Master Plan shall also include detailed cost estimates and receive approval from the Park and Recreation Advisory Board. Park Master Plans are to be prepared and submitted with the preliminary plat submittals, and must be approved prior to the final plat being presented to the City Planning Board.

c. **Soft Costs** – appropriate soft costs, associated with the design and construction of parks, trails, and boulevards may be paid by the SID and shall not exceed 40%. In the case that City Park Planning staff designs and administers construction of a neighborhood park, the SID’s soft costs shall not exceed 20%.
Trails

1. City approval is required and shall include approvals from the Park & Recreation Advisory Board, the Planning Board and the Omaha City Council.

2. Trail corridors must include acquisition of a 40’ wide linear trail easement within which the trail is to be constructed. SID expenditures associated with Trails acquisition costs shall be as follows:

   a. **Storm System Easement** - the Suburban Park Plan utilizes the Papillion Creek System as a major vehicle for constructing a trail system. A current storm water easement requires the dedication of that portion of a stream way as determined by the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District or a minimum of a horizontal distance equal to three times the depth of the creek plus 20 or 50 feet measured from the creek centerline. Along those streams proposed for a public trail, 40 feet of additional property should be acquired for trails and may be a general obligation expenditure of the SID.

   b. **Other Property Along Streams or Waterways** – any additional property required for the construction of a trail or trail related amenities in excess of the property may be acquired by the SID under the same restrictions as Park property.

   c. **Acquiring Additional Right-of-Way for Road Side Trails** – land and development costs for trails that are designed to adjoin roadways shall be incorporated into the right-of-way and roadway improvement costs.

3. Development of trails associated with the Suburban Park Plan:

   a. **Trail Location** – the Plan specifies the general location of all major recreational trails. SID financing for trails shall be limited to the trails specified in the Suburban Park Plan.

   b. **Trail Design** – the Department of Parks, Recreation and Public Property shall provide standard...
details to those SIDs developing trails as part of the Suburban Park Plan. A Registered Landscape Architect shall develop a trail master plan with direction provided by the Department of Parks, Recreation and Public Property. Each Trail Plan shall include a detailed cost estimate. Trail Master Plans are to be prepared and submitted with the preliminary plat submittal and approved by the Park and Recreation Advisory Board prior to consideration by the Planning Board.

c. **Soft Costs** – appropriate soft costs, associated with the development of trails may be paid by the SID and shall not exceed 40%.

**Boulevards and Parkways**

1. City approval is required and shall include approvals from the Park & Recreation Advisory Board, the Planning Board and the Omaha City Council. Acquisition expenditures shall be as follows:

   a. **Dedication for Public Streets** – a dedication of a minimum 100’ right-of-way shall be provided for those streets designated as the H.W.S. Cleveland Boulevard. A minimum 65’ right-of-way shall be dedicated for those streets designed as parkways or greenways. Right-of-way acquisition requirements over 65’ may be financed as a general obligation of the District.

2. Development of Boulevards and Parkways:

   a. **Locations** – The Plan specifies the routing of all boulevards and parkways which will guide the general placement of boulevard and parkways; however, minor location adjustments to accommodate traffic issues, topography or development limitations may be approved by the Department of Parks, Recreation and Public Property. SID financing for boulevards/parkways will be limited to those shown in the Plan.
b. **Boulevards/Parkways Design** - The Suburban Park Plan provides standard design criteria for various configurations of boulevards/parkways. SID expenditures associated with the development of these transportation facilities shall be limited to the cost of land acquisition over the standard 50' local road width, tree planting, cost of special lighting (boulevards only), the additional one foot of sidewalk width, trails and trail signage. A Registered Landscape Architect shall develop the Boulevard and Parkway Plan at a preliminary plat submittal stage, and shall continue to work with the engineer of the District throughout the final planting and construction process. Plans and costs estimates shall be provided for the approval of the Park and Recreation Advisory Board. Expenditures of SID funds for the development of boulevards and parkways requires City Council approval.

c. **Soft Costs** - Soft costs associated with development of boulevards/parkways may be paid by the SID and shall not exceed 40%.
Meeting the Park Contribution Requirement

Contributions by SID’s or other development related mechanisms toward the purchase of property or development of recreation facilities are eligible for reimbursement for actual expenditures. Reimbursement is not guaranteed and is based on criteria described in the Funding Section. Eligible reimbursements shall be formally incorporated into the subdivision agreement.

Delaying SID Contributions

Sanitary and Improvement District (“SID”) contributions or similar payments by other development mechanisms shall be formally incorporated into the Subdivision Agreement as part of the platting process.

The Plan’s Impact on SID General Obligation Debt

All payments to be made by SIDs, either for property purchase, facility development or those paid into the Park Development Fund may be a General Obligation of the District.
SID Partnerships

Two or more SIDs may be permitted to jointly fund the land purchase or facility development of a park or other facility contained within the Suburban Park Plan. Such arrangements must be supported by Inter-Local Agreements, clearly defining each party’s obligations.

Utilizing the Park Development Fund

At the City's sole discretion, funds available within the Park Development Fund may be utilized to purchase property for parks, trails and boulevards/parkways in accordance with the Suburban Park Plan.

The City may elect to utilize the Park Development Fund to purchase property within a developing or existing SID. On these occasions, this Fund may be utilized for the entire property purchase or in a joint funding agreement. Any purchase of property associated with a SID, utilizing the Park Development Fund in total or in part, will be governed by the restrictions controlling SID property purchases as represented in the Plan.
The Park Development Fund may also be utilized by the City to purchase property, independent of SID lands. The City is restricted in this use by the requirement that the property being purchased must be included in the Suburban Park Plan. Advanced acquisition is encouraged to reduce cost.

Lastly, the Park Development Fund may be used to retain consultants as necessary for the periodic update of the Plan.

**Relationship of Park Location to Contributing S.I.Ds**

1. **Neighborhood Parks** -- Service standards based on anticipated population and on travel distance provided the basis for locating park facilities. The result is that, generally, every section of land contains a neighborhood park that will serve residents living within that section.

   The primary functions of neighborhood parks are to provide basic play facilities, open space, and landscape enhancement. In addition, some of the neighborhood parks will contain minor active recreation facilities, based on service standards. Some sections of land do not contain a neighborhood park, but instead, contain a community or regional park that will serve the same functions as a neighborhood park to the reSIDents in that section.

   The Neighborhood Park contribution will be utilized primarily for those expenditures located within that section occupied by the contributing SID. In sections that have a community park instead of a neighborhood park, the neighborhood park contribution will be used toward the community park.

2. **Community Parks** – Community parks provide for the community-wide recreation needs. They may include sports complexes, extensive active play fields, recreation centers and aquatic facilities. Where the park provides an opportunity to preserve and enhance historic or natural resources, unique activities such as hiking trails, equestrian activities, historic or nature interpretation and other passive uses may be included.

   Organized sports leagues and teams will use different locations throughout a season, and historic and natural resource based activities are dependent on unique features. Therefore, the locations of the community parks are not based on specific travel distance service standards. Instead, the Parks and Recreation Element states that “Equitable accessibility for area residents can be achieved by distributing sports complexes as evenly as possible throughout the city.”
Due to the imminent need to purchase the land in the path of foreseeable development, and the significant acquisition costs associated with these larger parks, it would be wise to initially prioritize and target Community Park funds toward purchase of specific park sites. This Plan provides a method that, in the long-term, will provide equitable access to services through the geographic distribution of community parks.

Community Park fees shall be made at the final plat or as set out in the subdivision agreement, which will require payment directly into the Park Development Fund.

3. **Trails and Boulevards** - The Plan strives to make the network of trails, boulevards, greenways, and parkways meets the 1-1/3 to 1-1/2 mile service standard for trails set forth in the City's Parks and Recreation Element of the Omaha Master Plan. The result is a system that serves SID residents and businesses throughout the Plan area. Most sections of land incorporate segments of this system, with a few areas served by segments in adjacent sections.

Due to their linear and lengthy nature, trails and boulevards are enjoyed by residents and employees far outside of this service standard, and are actually more of a regional recreational resource. Therefore, unlike the Neighborhood Park fee, the Trail/Boulevard fee will not be designated to a certain segment of trail. Instead, the fee will be used to compensate SIDs which have constructed trails, in chronological order of the trail expenditures.

Payments to the trail fund will no longer be paid by the SID upon platting. Instead it will be assessed to individual lots upon obtaining a building permit as detailed in the Funding Section that follows.
Funding

HISTORY

The 2001 plan called for park fees to fund the acquisition and development. The fees were based on acreage of a development with the neighborhood park and trail/boulevard fees paid to the City at the time of final platting while the community park fee was specified in the Sanitary and Improvement District’s subdivision agreement, to be paid at the time when the SID’s debt ratio reached 10% or less. In 2011 an update was performed on the funding. The original fee was evaluated and several key areas were identified where revisions were necessary:

» Fee levels were not adequate to cover the full costs for neighborhood parks and trails/boulevards (land and infrastructure costs);

» Fees were not tied to escalation of park costs;

» The community park fees were inadequate to repay cost of land acquisition and park development; and

» The City had to wait too long to collect community park fees. Under this system, the City had to wait until the SID’s debt ratio reached 10% or less; it is usually upward of 10 years before that occurs; meanwhile, repayment of community park acquisition fell on the City.

Several solutions were developed to the problem areas. It was determined that different funding mechanisms would be appropriate for each of the type of park facility. The 2011 revisions to each fee were as follows:

Neighborhood Park Fee

» Neighborhood park expenditures will be determined on a case-by-case basis to allow for variances in land costs.

» Park construction estimates and land costs will be developed at the time of platting by the SID(s) acquiring the park land.

» Contributing SIDs will have their contribution written into their subdivision agreements.

» The SIDs will be responsible for paying differences in escalated costs to ensure that the SID that constructs the park remains whole.

» The SIDs will reimburse each other directly in terms set out in an inter-local agreement.
Trail and Boulevard Fee

» This fee has been adjusted for both inflation and to cover full costs of land acquisition and construction of the remaining trails and boulevards.

» There will be no SID platting fees for the trails and boulevards.

» A 0.158% TAB (Trail and Boulevard) fee will be assessed at the time of building permits for property located within the city or within the city’s zoning jurisdiction. However, the fees shall not be applicable to property located within development zones A, B, or C, as defined in the Urban Development Element of the city’s Master Plan. Likewise, properties within the Ponca Hills Environmental District shall be exempt from the fees due to the geographic remoteness of the District and the steep and wooded nature of the land which necessitates larger lots.

» Commercial and industrial developments will be charged a $1,170 TAB fee per acre of development collected at the time of the building permit.

Community Park Fee

» This fee will be adjusted for both inflation and to cover costs of future payment and repayment of community park land acquisition.

» The development of community parks will be funded by the City’s Capital Improvement Plan.

» The revenue requirements are split 50/50 between a fee paid at the time of platting and a fee collected on building permits.

» Residential developments would pay a fee of $450 per acre at the time of final platting (paid by the SID) This is a change from the previous plan, where the fee wasn’t paid until the SID attained a 10% debt ratio.

» Commercial and industrial developments would pay a platting fee of $800 per acre, to be paid at the time of final platting based on gross acreage.

» A 0.06% CP (Community Park) fee will be assessed at the time of building permit for property located within the city or within the city’s zoning jurisdiction. However, the fees shall not be applicable to property located within development zones A, B, or C, as defined in the Urban Development Element of the city’s Master Plan. Likewise, properties within the Ponca Hills Environmental District shall be exempt from the fees due to the geographic remoteness of the District and the steep and wooded nature of the land which necessitates larger lots.
2016 UPDATE

For the 2016 update the City has sought to evaluate the performance of the suburban parks 2011 funding strategy and make changes on an as needed basis. A funding evaluation was conducted by the consulting team on behalf of the City of Omaha. The funding evaluation was completed using a financial pro forma of each of the park types.

The goal of the funding evaluation is to determine whether adequate fees are being collected to recover the costs of providing the parks. The general methodology for conducting the pro forma analysis of each fee type required a systematic progression of steps including:

- Development of land use projections
- Development of remaining park costs
- Projection of costs with inflation
- Development of park revenue requirements
- Calculation of park fees

The following sections outline the progress of each step used to evaluate the fees for each of the community parks and trails and boulevards. Following the methodology, key findings and recommendations are presented as well as the recommended fees.

Neighborhood Parks Fee

Following the revision to the neighborhood parks funding strategy in 2011, no fees are collected by the City. The funding strategy has not been evaluated as part of this financial analysis.

Community Parks Fee

This section describes the steps to conduct the pro forma analysis of the community parks fee. The community parks fee is intended to recover the costs of community park land acquisition. In the 2011 update, the primary concern was the repayment to the City for the acquisition of Youngman Lake, and the debt service associated with White Hawk.

As of the 2015 update, the White Hawk debt service has been completed. The 2011 outstanding balance on Youngman Lake was approximately $2 million. The city agreed to a repayment schedule of 10 years with no interest collected. The updated
fees have raised approximately $430,000 between 2011 and 2014 bringing the remaining balance to $1.8 million (a portion of the funds went to White Hawk debt service).

With the White Hawk debt service completed and no scheduled community park land acquisition; the primary purpose of the community parks fee for this update period will be to continue repayment of the Youngman Lake acquisition.

The steps included to evaluate the fee requirements are as follows.

1. Development of land use projections: The first step involved is to develop projected future building permits and platted lots. Since the current intent of the fee is to spread the costs of repayment over a fixed period of time, five-year building permit and platted lot projections were developed for residential; and commercial and industrial developments. The projections were based on a five-year average from recent history (2010-2014) obtained from City of Omaha Planning Department reports.

2. Development of remaining park costs: Remaining land acquisition costs for Youngman Lake are approximately $1.8 million.

3. Development of park revenue requirements: The park costs are then allocated between residential and commercial shares (60/40 ratio).

4. Calculation of park fees: The community park revenue requirement is split 50/50 between building permit and platting fee and then allocated to potential future valuation.

**Trails and Boulevards Fee**

This section describes the steps to conduct the pro forma analysis of the trails and boulevards fee. The fee is set to cover the remaining future land acquisition and development costs of the trails and boulevards. The steps included to evaluate the fee requirements are as follows.

1. Development of land use projections: Two land use projections were created for the trails and boulevards park fee pro forma. Total gross developable acres were estimated for Douglas County based on the MAPA 2013 projections used in the Papio Watershed plan. Similar projections were also used in the 2011 update. The plan accounts for residential, commercial, industrial, and other land use types. The model projections were used to estimate total residential and commercial and industrial gross developable acres.
A second estimate was obtained from a GIS evaluation by the City of Omaha Planning department wherein acres of remaining vacant platted lots within the City boundary and undeveloped acres (net of rights of way and flood boundaries) were totaled. A ratio of residential acres to commercial and industrial acres was then applied to this estimate. This estimate did not account for the land which would be set aside for institutional uses (schools, religious, etc.) in the study area. As such the second estimate tends to slightly overestimate gross developable acres. The two estimates were compared to arrive at an average number of gross developable acres for the analysis.

2. Development of remaining trail and boulevard costs: The cost to construct the remaining trails and boulevards in the plan were estimated at $15.7 million (land and development).

3. Projection of costs with inflation: The trail and boulevard costs are inflated over the next 3 years to account for escalation in costs between evaluation periods. The City typically uses a 3.1% inflation rate for planning purposes. The total projected cost to the midpoint of the evaluation period is approximately $17.2 million.

4. Development of park revenue requirements: The park costs are then allocated between residential and commercial shares following a 70/30 ratio used in the 2001 plan.

5. Calculation of park fees: The trails and boulevards fee is then allocated to gross developable acres with an assumed 2.5 lots per acre and average valuation pulled from recent history of City of Omaha building permit data provided by the Planning Department.

Key Findings and Recommendations

Key findings and recommendations for the cost of service study are provided below.

- The City will continue to collect TAB and Community Parks fees from Residential and Commercial and Industrial land uses.

- Institutional land uses are exempt from the fee.

- The community parks fee was found to be successful in funding the repayment of Youngman Lake land acquisition as originally planned.

- Several SID’s were identified by the City which were eligible to pay the 2001 fee but had not yet been billed. Collections of those fees could help contribute significant funds to the community parks fund.
» A small reduction in the community parks platting fees is recommended. The platting fee may be decreased from $450 per acre for residential to $400 per acre; commercial and industrial from 800 per acre to $750 per acre based on gross acreage.

» A small reduction in the community parks building permit fees is recommended. The fee may be decreased from 0.06% to 0.05% of building permit value for all development types.

» There is a possibility Youngman Lake could be paid off earlier than forecasted given the additional revenue opportunities from unbilled 2001 platting fees. It is recommended that the City revisit the fee at the time the balance is paid off. The City can then evaluate how the fee will be used going forward.

» The City will continue to consider the cost of plan updates in the financing needs of the plan. This is funded under the community parks fee.

» The trails and boulevards fee is found to be successfully meeting the revenue requirements of the trails and boulevards system. No fee revisions are recommended at this time.

» The City should consider future maintenance cost needs of trails and boulevards which have been constructed under the 2001 plan to current. Financing improvements for aging infrastructure should be accounted for in future updates.

» The building permit valuations used to estimate potential revenues are based on the City’s current building permit valuation schedule made effective January 1, 2010. The City should maintain those valuations for the Suburban Parks Master Plan for the next update period to ensure the fee collections remains consistent with this evaluation.

**Suburban Master Plan Parks Fee Summary**

The findings in the financial analysis indicated that the revisions implemented in the 2011 update have been successful in meeting the funding needs of the Suburban Parks Master Plan. Based on this finding, no changes to the overall structure of any of the fees are required in this evaluation period. The financial analysis did identify an opportunity to decrease the community parks fees. The trails and boulevards fee
should remain at current levels implemented under the 2011 update. The following tables present a summary of the fees current fees and the proposed fees for each of the community parks and trails and boulevards.

### Table 1: Community Parks Current and Proposed Fees

<table>
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<th>Category</th>
<th>Platting Fees (per gross acres of development)</th>
<th>Building Permit Fees</th>
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### Table 2: Trails and Boulevards Current and Proposed Fees

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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Current Fees</th>
<th>Proposed Fees</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>0.16% of Building Valuation</td>
<td>0.16% of Building Valuation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>$1,170/acre</td>
<td>$1,170/acre</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, Table 3 and below present a comparison of fees that would be paid by developments across a range of development valuations.

### Table 3: Summary of Potential Fees Paid for Residential; and Commercial and Industrial Developments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lot Valuation</th>
<th>Current CP Fees</th>
<th>Proposed Fees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$150,000 Home</td>
<td>$450 per acre Platting Fee, $86 per Lot CP Fee, $240 per Lot TAB Fee</td>
<td>$400 per acre Platting Fee, $74 per Lot CP Fee, $240 per Lot TAB Fee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$250,000 Home</td>
<td>$450 per acre Platting Fee, $143 per Lot CP Fee, $400 per Lot TAB Fee</td>
<td>$400 per acre Platting Fee, $123 per Lot CP Fee, $400 per Lot TAB Fee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$500,000 Home</td>
<td>$450 per acre Platting Fee, $286 per Lot CP Fee, $800 per Lot TAB Fee</td>
<td>$400 per acre Platting Fee, $246 per Lot CP Fee, $800 per Lot TAB Fee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C&amp;I Developments</td>
<td>$800 per acre Platting Fee, 0.06% of value CP Fee, $1,170 per acre TAB Fee</td>
<td>$750 per acre Platting Fee, 0.05% of value CP Fee, $1,170 per acre TAB Fee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part IV:

Plan Elements

The location of proposed Parks, Trails, Boulevards, Cultural/Historic Areas, and Natural Areas are illustrated on the Locator Map. These elements are generally sited to take advantage of unique environmental conditions or, in areas that can be anticipated in advance of development, as ideal for optimal public service.

A critical issue, which cannot be anticipated in advance of development, is the exact relationship between the facilities proposed by the Suburban Park Plan and the eventual development that will be introduced into the surrounding area. Therefore, it is anticipated that this Plan will retain a level of flexibility, allowing it to be “fine tuned” at the appropriate time. Successful implementation requires the ongoing cooperation of the City, Omaha’s development community, park user groups, neighborhood associations and many others. Allowing the Suburban Park Plan to adjust to specific issues and the positive input of these groups is necessary to secure the Plan’s success.

Omaha’s Suburban Park Plan is a long-range, visionary document. Every three years, however, the Plan should be re-examined and amended as necessary. Additionally, unique opportunities, not anticipated in the Plan, may become available. Such opportunities are to be immediately reviewed and, if appropriate, added.
Parks
The following is a listing of each park type illustrated on the Locator Map. The park locations shown in the master plan are diagrammatic in size and configuration. Appendix B describes each specific park in terms of approximate size, content of recreational facilities, and its defining characteristics, including natural features, important site conditions and/or key relationships to adjacent land.

The park facilities are divided into two major categories.

NEIGHBORHOOD PARK
Neighborhood Parks are intended to serve a specific residential neighborhood within an approximate six block (half-mile) radius. Neighborhood Parks are meant to be primarily passive in use containing basic play facilities, landscape enhancements and open space. Some of these parks will contain minor active recreational facilities as needed to meet recreation service requirements. Neighborhood Parks are generally located near the center of the land section to allow for more convenient and equal access by future neighborhood residents. Future residential neighborhoods should allow for pedestrian connections to the park site with permanent easements.

Stormwater facilities may only be located in a park only if necessitated by park improvements.

COMMUNITY PARK
Community Parks serve a broader purpose than the neighborhood parks. The focus is on meeting community-wide recreation needs. These parks often contain neighborhood and community play facilities, active play/sports fields, recreation complexes and aquatic facilities. These parks are usually a minimum of 50 acres.
Top Left
The Grove Park, a neighborhood park

Top Right
Kite Festival in Lawrence Youngman Lake, a community park

Bottom
Whitehawk Park, a community park
In addition to the two major park classifications, the plan proposes other recreational and/or environmental features as follows:

**CULTURAL & HISTORIC SITES**

These sites contain features of important historical or cultural value that should be protected and enhanced.

**URBAN FILTER/WILDLIFE CORRIDORS**

These are areas planned along waterways; they are planned to function as natural filters to urban runoff and serve as linear wildlife corridors.
Trails

Omaha is developing an extensive system of trails. Trail development is an important component of the Suburban Park system. The trail system should continue growing, allowing more access throughout the city. The goal is a linked city with a more pedestrian feel.

The Suburban Park Master Plan follows the basic premise of linking parks with transportation corridors was originally envisioned by H.W.S. Cleveland. Examples include: Old Lincoln Highway Trail, West Papio Trail, Old Military Highway Linear Park, and Big Papio Trail. The birth of Omaha’s modern day trails can be traced to 1990. On July 4, 1990 of that year, Omaha opened the first phase of the Keystone Trail. The success of this initial three-mile section of paved, recreational trail fostered a record of trail construction, which is unmatched in the United States. Over a period of less than 10 years, more than 67 miles of paved, interconnected trails were constructed. Omaha became a City of trails and greenways.

The success of the Omaha Metropolitan Area trails can be traced to a unique, coordinated effort between the area’s governmental agencies. In planning and developing trails, each agency set aside its individual interests to ensure an orderly, “common sense” approach, resulting in a trail system larger than any individual organization could accomplish alone. The original trail partners, Douglas County, the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District and the City of Omaha has been expanded to include all neighboring counties in both Nebraska and Iowa.
Omaha’s trail system fulfills multiple needs. Trails provide unique opportunities for recreation. They link residents to nature, and present an opportunity for families to relax and enjoy the outdoors. Omaha’s trail system is accessible to a wide variety of user groups, such as joggers, bicyclists, skaters, cross-country skiers, hikers, persons with disabilities and nature lovers. The function of Omaha’s trails, however, extends beyond providing recreational opportunities. Today, residents utilize trails as an alternative to the automobile and other more traditional methods of transportation. They use the trails to get to work. Schools have developed along trails, and now boast “you can walk your children to school on the West Papio Trail.” Shoppers and others have discovered that using the trails, for transportation can be as fast as, and certainly more fun, than driving!

The Suburban Park System Master Plan continues this philosophy of trails, both as a recreational opportunity and a transportation alternative. The Map indicates the proposed routing of trails within the Suburban Park planning area.
Boulevards

The 1889 Cleveland Plan proposed the integration of open spaces through the construction of “broad ornamental avenues, known as boulevards or parkways” designed “with a tasteful arrangement of trees and shrubbery at (their) sides and in the center”. This vision resulted in the development of some of Omaha’s most scenic neighborhood streets such as Florence, Happy Hollow, and Hanscom Boulevards. Nearly 100 years later, these types of streets in Omaha and across the country are some of the most desirable places to live and often hold higher real estate valuations. They weave neighborhoods together while providing scenic streets which link parks together. They provide comfortable places for people to walk. Their very form speaks of family and tradition.

In an effort to more closely tie central Omaha development patterns to the suburban areas, this parks plan recommends the continuation of H.W.S. Cleveland’s original boulevard concept to link parks and open spaces. The boulevards and parkways shown in this plan are designed to provide a variety of experiences for the user. They generally follow the natural contour of the land, often progressing from low areas to high points. They often follow valleys and ridge lines to provide a variety of views and scenic vistas. Following the natural contour of the land also minimizes grading. These routes should be as continuous as possible and contain long curves and short tangents for a more pleasant route.
The routes shown on the plan are intended to be diagrammatic. Slight adjustment in their location may occur if the general intent of their routing (proximity to low area vegetation, high point vistas, etc.) is preserved.

There must be a 35’ no-build easement along both sides of the boulevard or parkway, in which no structures, including parking lots, porches, steps may be constructed. Waivers or changes to the required no-build area may be permitted based upon a specific plan. The plan must provide benefits to the boulevard or parkway, such as buildings fronting upon the street with associated sidewalk and pedestrian improvements. Such plans must be acceptable to Parks, Planning and Public Works Departments and must be tied to the approval of a mixed-use plan, use permit or other specific development plan. The Parks Department will make the final determination as to appropriateness of the proposed plan for the boulevard/parkway.

Likewise, lots shall not back onto the boulevard or parkway. Side or front lots are acceptable but all lots must respect the 35’ no-build easement. Waivers may be considered if it can be demonstrated that the topography or mandated street layout issues makes this prohibitive. Inability to provide walk-out basements is not considered to be a topographic constraint.
Appendix C, “Boulevard Design Guidelines”, illustrates other design considerations for boulevards and parkways.

The following are the two types of boulevards recommended in this plan and a general description of each.

**THE GRAND BOULEVARD: H.W.S. CLEVELAND BOULEVARD**

This is the grand boulevard which links parks, open spaces, historic features and residential neighborhoods together. The boulevard is designed with a wide right-of-way (100’ min.) to create a scenic “green corridor” for both automobiles and pedestrians. The standard 100’ R.O.W. can be increased if necessary due to physical constraints or design related problems such as the protection of drainage ways, natural vegetation and steep slopes, proper sight distance, street alignment, street design and intersection needs, and/or other similar situations. There must be a 35’ no-build easement along either side of the boulevard, in which no structures, including parking lots, may be constructed.

Sidewalk widths, trees, light fixtures, signage and amenities should be in conformance with the Boulevard Standards contained within this document.
THE PARKWAY

The parkway the primary type of boulevard used to link the park system together. The parkway is designed with a 65’ right-of-way section. Centered in the parkway lawn are shade trees forming a continuous canopy over the street. Tree species may vary, but should be of similar form, height and scale. Sidewalks are 6’ wide for more comfortable walking.

A variation of the Parkway occurs when the Parkway abuts a public open space, park or natural area, forming a contiguous public green space. The parkway provides high visibility to the park or open space setting thereby creating a public amenity for all who drive or walk by. The park or open space should have a well landscaped image from the parkway. Signage for the park or open space should be highly visible, and shall conform to City of Omaha Department of Property and Public Property Standards, and the Boulevard Standards contained within this document.
Natural Resources

Natural resources and the ecological systems they support are the building blocks of our communities. Ecosystems from floodplain forests to prairies provide valuable ecological services from flood reduction and soil stabilization to stormwater management and improved quality of life for the community’s residents.

The City of Omaha and most of Douglas County lie within the Nebraska/Kansas Loess Hills ecoregion. Ecoregions denote areas of general similarity in natural resources commonly referred to as ecosystems. The Nebraska/Kansas Loess Hills ecoregion is characterized by dissected loess hills with deep, silty, well drained soils that historically supported tallgrass prairie vegetation with oak-hickory forests located along streams.

“*Nebraska’s rich biological diversity is composed of thousands of plant and animal species interacting with each other and the environment. The flora and fauna of the state, along with the natural habitats they occupy, form Nebraska’s natural heritage – a legacy that should be treasured just as much as our cultural heritage.*”

(Nebraska Natural Legacy Project, 2011)
Top
Bluestem Prairie Preserve east of 168th Street between Blondo Street and West Dodge Road

Bottom
Woodland near Rainwood and N. 234th Street
PRAIRIES AND GRASSLANDS

The tallgrass prairie ecosystem once present throughout the eastern third of the state has been replaced with agricultural practices ranging from row crop production to grassland and livestock pastures. Prairies occurring on loess (wind blown) or glacial till are generally restricted to the steep bluffs of the Missouri River valley, but may occur elsewhere as patches. Grasses like Big Bluestem (Andropogon gerardii) and Indian grass (Sorghastrum nutans) are the dominant species present.

Agricultural conversion and urbanization have resulted in the loss of most prairie and grassland ecosystems within the county. However, small tracts of native grasses and remnant prairies may still exist on private land. Preservation, restoration, and integration of tracts with prairie or grassland ecosystems into the park system should be considered as opportunities arise.

FORESTS AND WOODLANDS

The oak-hickory woodlands and forests present within eastern Nebraska represent the western fringe of the eastern deciduous forest in North America. Presently, it is found on the steep loess bluffs of the Missouri and lower Platte River valleys. Historically, upland forest systems in the Omaha area were dominated by oaks like Bur Oak (Quercus macrocarpa), and Chinquapin Oak (Quercus muehlenbergii), and may have Bitternut (Carya cordiformis) and Shagbark Hickory (Carya ovata) as co-dominants. Over time, the oak-hickory community has been replaced by Red Oak- Basswood-Ironwood Forest community due to logging and fire suppression. Agricultural conversion and urbanization have also greatly impacted these forest ecosystems.

The steeper topography found within areas adjacent to the Missouri, Elkhorn, and Platte Rivers in the northwest and western parts of Douglas County supports the presence of this upland forest community. Tract size is highly variable throughout the rural/suburban portions of the County and appears to be largely in private ownership.
RIPARIAN SYSTEMS

Riparian systems are areas of vegetation adjacent to streams, rivers, or other bodies of water. Eastern Riparian Forest occurs on the floodplains and lower terraces of major streams and rivers. This ecosystem is dominated by Cottonwood (Populus deltoides), Silver Maple (Acer saccharinum), Green Ash (Fraxinus pennsylvanica), American Elm (Ulmus americana), Hackberry (Celtis occidentalis), Boxelder (Acer negundo), and White Mulberry (Morus alba). Roughleaf Dogwood (Cornus drummondii) is the common understory shrub.

Patches of riparian forests are located adjacent to the numerous streams within the County. The size and composition of this forest type is highly dependent upon location within the watershed and adjacent land use. Preservation and restoration of these forests is critical as they provide a valuable function by buffering streams from the negative impacts of surrounding land uses, providing habitat for wildlife, and creating travel corridors for wildlife and people.

WETLANDS

Wetlands in this part of Nebraska are generally associated with the channels and floodplains of the Missouri, Platte, and Elkhorn Rivers and their larger tributaries. Vegetative communities within this ecosystem consist of herbaceous wetlands and an assortment of woodland communities including Eastern Riparian Forest. The frequency and amount of flooding generally dictates the types of plants found within the various wetland communities.

Wetlands perform important functions in filtering sediment and pollutants from stormwater runoff, preventing shoreline erosion, and providing valuable habitat for a variety of wildlife. The numerous lakes and ponds found throughout the County provide opportunities to restore or create a diverse mix of wetland ecosystems.
BENEFITS OF NATURAL RESOURCES

According to Omaha By Design’s Natural Environment Advisory Group, natural features such as streams, bluffs, woodlands, wetlands, prairie remnants, and other natural open spaces should be preserved and integrated as open space in the community. The Advisory Group has noted the following objectives:

» Preserving and restoring important natural features, views that enhance the city’s setting, and other connections with nature that improve the community’s quality of life.

» Applying a systems-oriented approach to urban solutions (e.g., using natural systems such as the water cycle to influence the design of urban stormwater systems).

» Designing the urban pattern of development to integrate natural features into an open space and recreation network that extends throughout the community.

» Prioritizing the health and integrity of the natural environment and the associated benefits to people when making decisions.

» Striving for a regenerative impact on the environment at all scales of development, from individual sites to the whole community, which will minimize energy consumption, support renewable energy, provide food on a local scale, and ensure that air and water are clean.

Land use patterns can greatly impact the form and function of riparian corridors and other natural systems. However, by integrating these natural systems into infrastructure plans for communities, we can create opportunities to protect valuable resources while providing recreational amenities for the public. One example that most communities are familiar with is riparian buffers, the vegetated corridors adjacent to streams, rivers, and other water bodies.

Riparian buffers can provide direct economic and environmental benefits by stabilizing streams, separating people and structures from flood hazards, protecting public infrastructure from damage, and managing stormwater to protect and improve water quality. They can also provide indirect benefits such as wildlife habitats, recreational opportunities, and improved community quality of life.
In Omaha and Douglas County, buffer width is based on the type of stream and its location within the watershed. Standard guidelines for buffer widths in Omaha include:

» Perennial streams – 3 times bank height plus 50 feet
» Intermittent streams – 3 times bank height plus 20 feet
» Ephemeral streams and grassed waterways – no buffer required

Stream corridors are present throughout the City and County. Therefore, by protecting and enhancing riparian buffers which become greenway corridors, the City and County can accomplish stormwater management goals and infrastructure enhancements while also providing recreational corridors that connect people to places within and outside of their communities, and valuable wildlife habitats and travel corridors.

Finally, diverse, quality ecosystems provide opportunities for people to participate in nature-based recreation including bird watching, wildlife viewing, canoeing, hiking, fishing, and hunting. Availability of various types of nature-based recreation is generally dependent upon the size and types of resources present. It is important to provide this type of recreation as it helps to establish personal connections to nature, educates people about the importance of biological diversity, and motivates individuals to support conservation efforts.