parks & recreation master plan

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Revised February, 2024

forward

This Parks & Recreation Master Plan is created to support the originally created "El Cajon 2030: Connecting People with Parks" Plan adopted by El Cajon City Council in April 2019. That plan was part of a National Recreation & Park Association (NRPA) Technical Assistance Grant first received in the spring of 2018. That year, El Cajon was the only California City to receive the grant. The grant was intended to increase park access to the citizenry and El Cajon was able to also turn that document into a parks master plan document.

Starting in 2022, the El Cajon Parks & Recreation Department started down the path seeking accreditation from the NRPA. As such, we needed to update El Cajon 2030 with relevant data for a refreshed parks and recreation master plan that included some features beyond El Cajon 2030. Those updates start on page 40 of this document, which follows El Cajon 2030.

Frank Carson

Frank Carson, Parks & Recreation Director, City of El Cajon







EL CAJON 2030 CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH PARKS







EL CAJON 2030 CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH PARKS



APRIL 2019

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CITIZENS OF EL CAJON

Thank you to the hundreds of youth, parents and community members and stakeholders who participated in the 18 community meetings hosted between January and April 2019 to finalize the plan.

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01 INTRODUCTION

Everyone benefits from living within walking distance of park. That's the simple logic behind the 10-Minute Walk campaign led by the Trust for Public Land (TPL), the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), and the Urban Land Institute (ULI). As a recipient of the first round of 10-Minute Walk Planning & Technical Assistance grants, the City of El Cajon embarked on a planning process aimed at increasing access to high quality parks for everyone in the city.

As a built-out city with a legacy of limited and varyingly distributed parkland, El Cajon faces particular challenges in increasing park access for the 44 percent of residents who are park deficient today. This El Cajon 2030: Connecting Parks with People plan builds on the great strides El Cajon has made to address access challenges while balancing the competing needs of more than 105,000 diverse residents. This Plan recommends strategies and realistic solutions to fill in the remaining gaps, drawing from a community engagement effort especially targeting those areas of El Cajon that are "underparked."

Planning Process

El Cajon leveraged the opportunity provided by the Planning & Technical Assistance Grant to conduct a strategic planning process based on a broad-reaching community engagement campaign. This resulting plan, known as El Cajon 2030, serves as the City's 10-Minute Walk Plan: Connecting People with Parks.

The planning process is outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Planning Process

Analysis October–December 2018

- TPL provides ParkServe[™] GIS data
- El Cajon conducts additional analysis
- El Cajon identifies areas lacking 10-minute access
- El Cajon secures consultant technical assistance

Community Engagement & Needs Assessment

January–April 2019

- El Cajon and consultant design engagement tools
- El Cajon and consultant conduct community workshop
- El Cajon uses engagement tools to conduct outreach campaign
- El Cajon and consultant document and analyze results

Recommendations & Action Plan March–April 2019

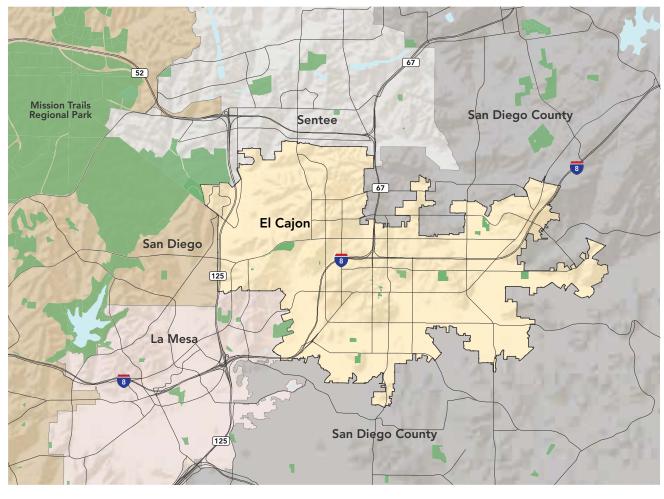
- Consultant conducts additional analysis to define "search areas" and access needs
- Consultant identifies potential solutions
- El Cajon and consultant develop action plan
- El Cajon adopts the plan

Planning Context

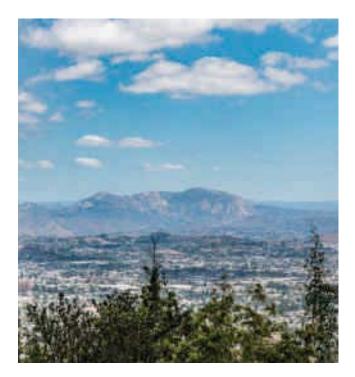
El Cajon is located within San Diego County, 15 miles east of San Diego, between the cities of La Mesa and Santee. It's a small city (14.4 square miles) that was incorporated in 1912. Known for its residential neighborhoods, El Cajon is also a regional retail center, a health care center, and home to corporations including nationally known Taylor Guitars.

Figure 2 shows El Cajon's location within San Diego County and the transportation infrastructure that connects the city to the larger region. This infrastructure creates challenges for walkability: Interstate 8 bisects the city, and State Route 67 creates a barrier between east and west that is compounded by the presence of Gillespie Field, the airport at the north end. In addition, the west side of El Cajon is hilly with a disconnected street network that responds to the topography. These factors affect the travel distance and routes people use to get to parks.

Figure 2: El Cajon's Physical Context



As shown in Figure 3, El Cajon is dominated by residentially zoned areas, including a mix of single family and multi-family areas. These residential areas are the places where parkland within a 10-minute walk is desired. In addition, commercial and manufacturing land uses are primarily aligned along the transportation corridors and around the airport. There are very few vacant parcels of land throughout the city, in residential or non-residential areas, which means there are limited opportunities to create new parks, especially larger ones.



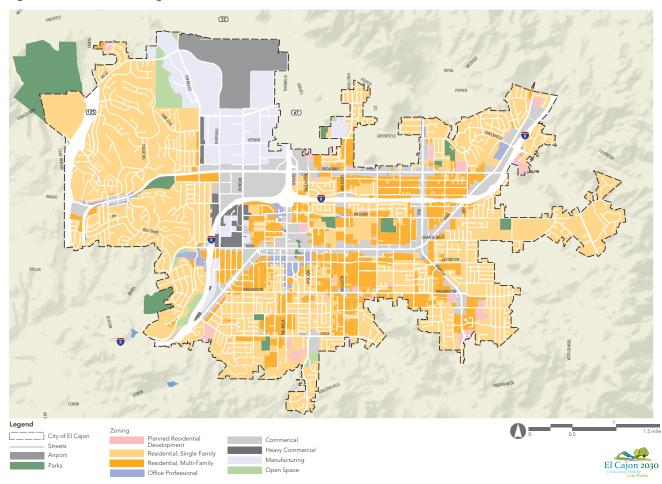


Figure 3: Land Use and Zoning

DEMOGRAPHIC SNAPSHOT

El Cajon's population of approximately 105,000 residents is ethnically and culturally diverse, and the city has been a hub for refugees. Forty-three percent of El Cajon residents speak a language other than English at home, with 21 percent of residents reporting that they speak English less than very well.¹ The city is home to a large Spanish-speaking community, as well as a Middle Eastern community that primarily speaks Arabic and/or Chaldean.

Figure 4 shows El Cajon's demographic profile from the 2013–2017 American Community Survey.

El Cajon is a young community, with 26 percent of residents younger than 18 years old and 52 percent of the population younger than 35, suggesting a large number of young families and young adults. Comparatively, 42 percent of California's population is younger than 35. The city's median household income is \$49,445, compared to a statewide median income of \$67,169. Twenty-three percent of residents live below the poverty line.² This income may suggest a lack of discretionary income to spend on traveling to parks or participating in recreation programs located beyond walking/biking distance.

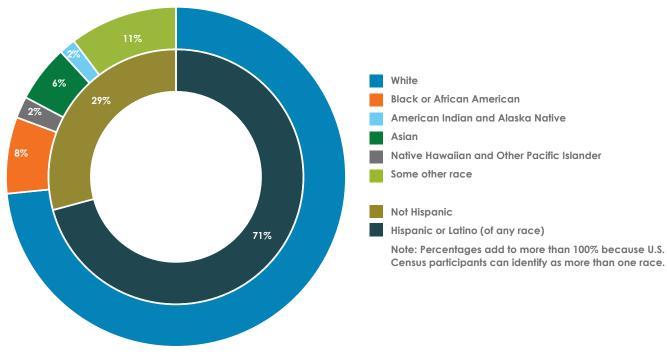


Figure 4: El Cajon Community Race and Hispanic Origin (2013–2017 American Community Survey)

1 U.S. Census Bureau, 2013–2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

2 U.S. Census Bureau, 2013–2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Community Engagement

The community engagement process for El Cajon 2030 was designed to reach key populations including youth—and to be efficient and informative for audiences of different ages, ethnicities and geographies. For these reasons, El Cajon and the consultant team developed a set of five questions that could be used in multiple settings and formats. These questions were translated into Spanish and Arabic, and multi-lingual staff were present at the outreach sessions. In addition, younger youth were invited to respond to questions 1, 2 and 3 and the My Dream Park drawing activity, where they were asked to draw, color and describe the type of park amenities desired near them.

Table 1 summarizes the community engagement opportunities provided during the planning process. The Appendix includes a compilation of results from these activities.

5 Outreach Questions

- 1. Where do you go to recreate or play?
- 2. Only 44 percent of El Cajon residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park.

--Which park is closest to your home? --Which park do you go to most frequently?

- 3. What are the greatest recreation needs in our city?
- 4. Are there any opportunities in your neighborhood or in the city to add a new park or recreation activity? Where? What is needed there?
- 5. Please share additional comments or ideas.

Table 1: Summary of Community Engagement Opportunities

Outreach Session	Date	Target Audience
Community Workshop	January 26, 2019	Adults
Anza	February 12, 2019	Adults
Johnson	February 14, 2019	Adults
Chase	February 21, 2019	Adults
Chase	February 28, 2019	4 th and 5 th graders
Johnson	February 28, 2019	Adults
Johnson	February 28, 2019	3 rd and 4 th graders
Lexington	March 1, 2019	3 rd , 4 th and 5 th graders
Meridian	March 15, 2019	4 th and 5 th graders
Magnolia	April 12, 2109	Adults



El Cajon held workshops and meetings with adults and elementary school youth in English, Spanish and Arabic.



El Cajon's youth provided ideas for the future in "My Dream Park" drawings.

02 NEEDS AND PRIORITIES

This chapter provides an overview of El Cajon's existing parks and facilities, presents the results of the 10-minute walk analysis, and discusses community needs and priorities.

Inventory of Parks and Facilities

El Cajon has approximately 120 acres of parkland.¹ Of that acreage, 17 percent is provided in joint use sites owned by local school districts. Even including the school sites, only 1.3 percent of El Cajon's total land area within the city is parkland.

El Cajon provides far less parkland than many highdensity or low-density cities. TPL's ParkScore™ data show that 9 percent is the median figure for parkland as a percentage of city area for medium high-density cities, a category that includes Chula Vista, San Jose and Stockton. For medium low-density cities, a category that includes Fremont, Fresno, Irvine, Riverside, Sacramento and San Diego, the median figure is 7.8 percent.

Table 2 on the next page summarizes the inventory of El Cajon parks and joint use sites. As this table notes, Fire Station Park and Judson Park lack amenities, and several other sites have limited amenities, often due to their small size. While these sites count in terms of providing some type of park access within a 10-minute walk, they do not provide the quality of recreation opportunities desired.

Recreation and Community Centers

Bostonia Center* Fletcher Hills Center Hillside Center* Kennedy Center* Renette Park Community Center* Ronald Reagan Community Center *includes gymnasium

Not included in the inventory of park land is the 53-acre Harry Griffen Park, which lies adjacent to El Cajon and within the city boundaries of La Mesa. Harry Griffen Park is a regional park operated as part of a joint powers authority composed of the Helix Water District, Grossmont Union High School District, the County of San Diego, and the cities of El Cajon and La Mesa. This site is counted in terms of the local access to parkland it provides to El Cajon residents. In addition, Mission Trails Regional Park is nearby and can be accessed from El Cajon by a trail near Grossmont College. Mission Trails is a large park with 60 miles of hiking, mountain bike and equestrian trails and a rock climbing area, among other amenities.

1 Though the City has a joint use agreement in place with Granite Hills High School, its acreage is not included in the 120-acre total because it is not open to the public.

Table 2: El Cajon's 2019 Park Inventory

Site Name	Joint Use Site	Recreation Center	Gymnasium	Park Amenities
Albert Van Zanten Park				Playing fields, ballfields, courts, restroom
Bill Beck Park				Playground, picnic tables, fitness court
Bostonia Park		•	•	Playing fields, courts, playground, picnic tables, fitness court
Cajon Valley Middle School Park	•		•	Playing fields, courts, ballfields, basketball courts (lighted), restroom
El Cajon Centennial Plaza				Amphitheater/stage, picnic tables
El Cajon Valley High School	•			Playing courts, tennis courts, basketball courts, restroom
Fire Station Park				None
Fletcher Hills Park and Pool		•		Playing courts, playground, picnic tables, basketball courts, swimming pool
Granite Hills High School	•			Use of site per joint use agreement
Hillside Park		•	•	Playing fields, picnic tables, restroom
Judson Park				None
Kennedy Park and Skatepark		•	•	Playing fields, courts, playground, picnic tables, ballfields, skatepark, restroom
Prescott Promenade				Amphitheater/stage
Renette Park		•	•	Playing fields, courts, playground, picnic tables, amphitheater/stage, basketball courts (lighted), restroom
Ronald Reagan Community Center		•		None
Stoney's Neighborhood Park				Playground
Tuttle Park				Playing fields, ballfields, restroom
Wells Park and Offleash Dog Park				Playing fields, playground, picnic tables, fitness court, ballfield, off-leash dog park, restroom

Though it has very limited park land, El Cajon is fortunate to have six indoor recreation centers—four with gymnasiums—that support recreation for residents. According to NRPA Park Metrics data, El Cajon provides a higher level of service for recreation centers and almost twice the level of service in terms of number of residents per facility than the median for agencies serving more than 2,500 people per square mile. In addition, El Cajon has amphitheater/stage areas at three sites, a large off-leash area that includes a dog agility course, an outdoor swimming pool and a formal skate park. This does not include the off-leash area and amphitheater at Harry Griffen Park.

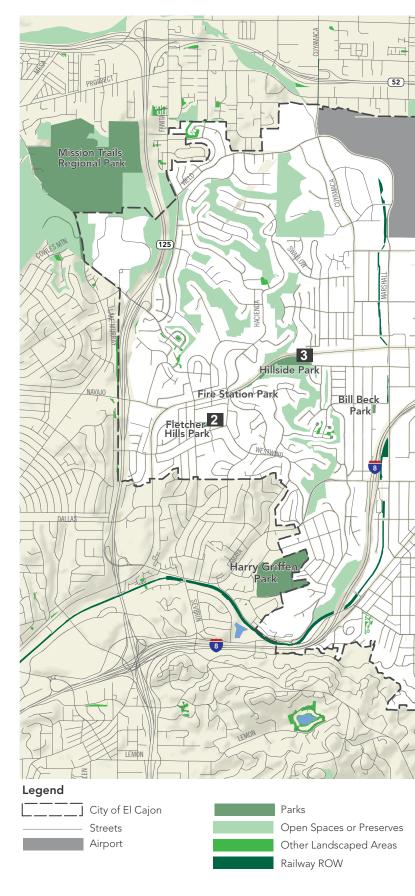


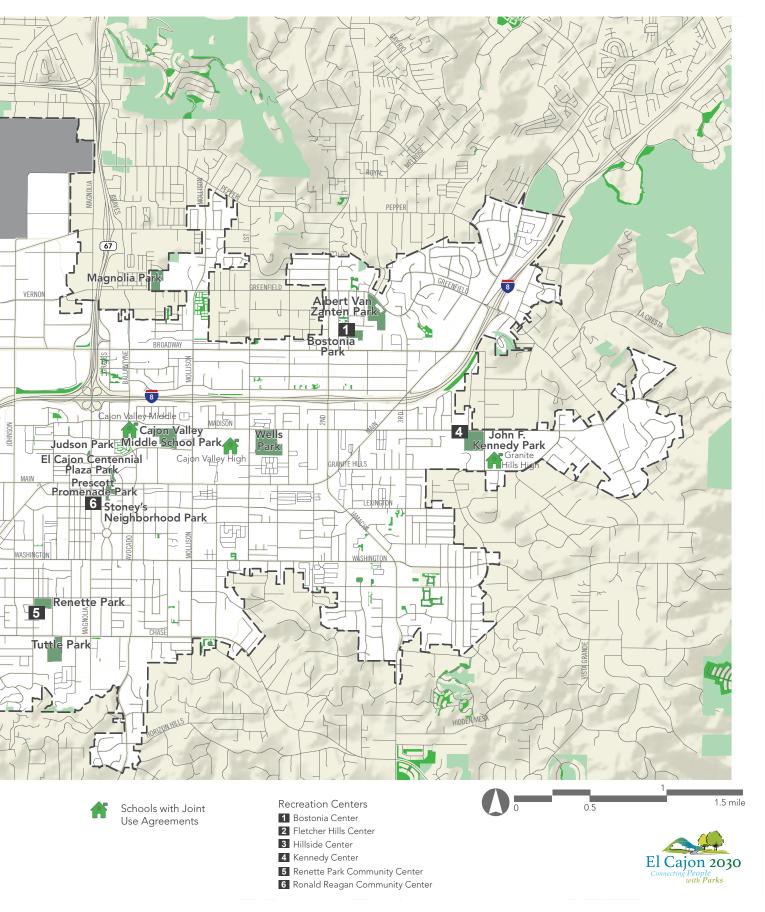
El Cajon's parks provide essential green space and recreation opportunities

El Cajon's Parkland

Figure 5 illustrates the location of El Cajon's parkland, along with parks owned by other agencies in and near El Cajon, open spaces and preserves, schools and colleges. The is the base map used for the 10-minute walk analysis.

Figure 5: Parkland Base Map





10-Minute Walk Access

TPL provides a cursory evaluation of areas in El Cajon served by a park within a 10-minute walk. TPL's methodology considers publicly owned local, state, and national parks; school parks that have a joint-use agreement with the local government; and privatelyowned parks that are managed for full public use. The ParkServe® analysis shows 10-minute walk service areas using Esri's Network Analyst extension. The 10-minute walk is approximated by a one-half mile travel distance. The analysis factors in physical barriers such as highways, train tracks, and rivers.

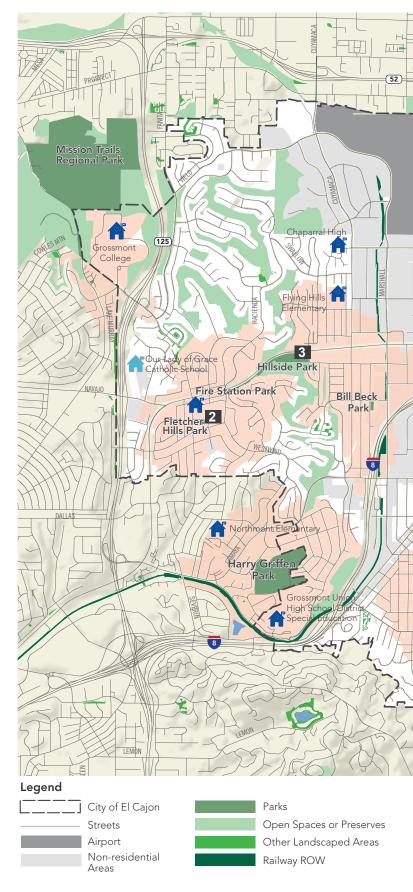
For each park service area, the ParkServe® team created demographic profiles showing race/ ethnicity, age, and income based on 2017 US Census Block Group estimates provided by Esri. For more information, see the ParkServe® website: https:// parkserve.tpl.org/about/

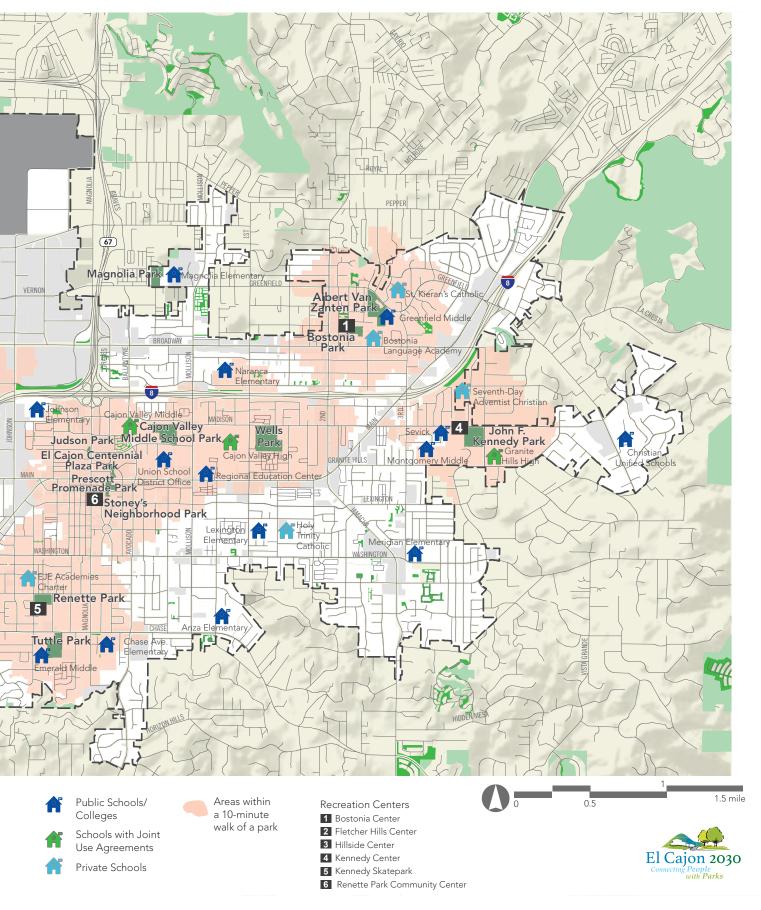
Based on the population data reported in ParkServe[®], just over 47,000 of El Cajon's 105,000 residents (44 percent) have access to a park within a 10-minute walk. Nationally, the average is 54 percent.

To ensure the 10-Minute Walk Access Analysis for El Cajon is based on current data, the analysis was updated by El Cajon's GIS staff. The analysis applies TPL's ParkServe[®] methodology with updated park and land use Geographic Information System (GIS) data.

Figure 6 shows the result of the updated analysis. In addition to the parks listed in City's inventory (Table 2), this analysis incorporates Harry Griffen Park and Grossmont College, both which provide recreation opportunities and open space. In the map, the shaded areas within the city illustrate all areas served within a 10-minute walk of a park. These service areas have irregular shapes because they reflect the actual paths of travel to nearby park sites.

Figure 6: 10-Minute Walk Analysis





Community Needs and Priorities

The community engagement process provided insights into the needs and priorities of both adults and children. This section reviews results from the five meetings with adults in response to the five outreach questions. It also provides high level content analysis of the "My Dream Park" drawings completed by children at Chase, Johnson, Lexington and Meridian Elementary Schools. The community's input directly shaped the potential solutions presented in Chapter 3 and influenced the recommendations in Chapter 4.

QUESTION 1:

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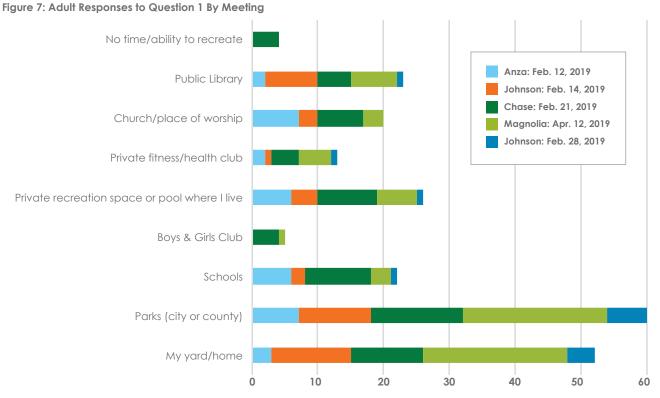
WHERE DO YOU GO TO RECREATE OR PLAY? Adults report using parks as the most frequently visited place for recreation and play, underscoring the importance of parks even in a community where many don't have access to a park within walking distance. For these participants, parks are used for recreation even more often than their own yards. Schools and libraries are also common places for recreation. Private recreation space/pools at their place of residence and churches are the two most typically

Table 3: Adult Responses to Question 1

1. Where do you go to recreate or play? (Select all that apply)	Total
My yard/ home	52
Parks (city or country)	60
Schools	22
Boys & Girls Club	5
Private recreation space or pool where I live	26
Private fitness/ health club	13
Church/ place of worship	20
Public Library	23
No time/ ability to recreate	4

visited places for recreation, besides home, that are owned privately or by a non-profit. These responses indicate that other public spaces such as schools and libraries are already being used for recreation, as are churches. These places may offer opportunities for partnerships to expand park access.

Figure 7 depicts the results by meeting. Table 3 shows the totals across all meetings held with adults.



EL CAJON 2030: CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH PARKS \ NEEDS AND PRIORITIES

QUESTION 2: WHICH PARK IS CLOSEST TO YOUR HOME? WHICH PARK DO YOU GO TO MOST FREQUENTLY?

Renette and Wells Parks were cited most frequently by participants as being the park closest to home, and both were also noted as frequently visited parks. Magnolia Elementary was also mentioned, as was the mall's play area.

In El Cajon, in addition to Renette and Wells being noted as frequently visited by respondents, Kennedy and Harry Griffen Parks also were mentioned by respondents. Outside of El Cajon, Santee and Balboa Parks were mentioned by multiple respondents as frequently visited parks. The parks cited by respondents as frequently visited all have a variety of amenities at one location, allowing for a longer stay and providing more to do. Though El Cajon's parks are smaller, there are opportunities to increase the variety of amenities at existing sites and to provide a mix of amenities and features at new sites. Figure 8: Which Park is Closest to Your Home?



Figure 9: Which Park Do You Go To Most Frequently?

Balboa Lindo Lake Harry Griffen Library Stoney's Reneded Bostonia Bostonia Kennedy

QUESTION 3: WHAT ARE THE GREATEST RECREATION NEEDS IN OUR CITY?

Though Question 3 asked respondents to choose their top three, a number chose multiple answers. All answers were counted in the analysis. The responses to this question indicate that while playgrounds, picnic areas and safe places to walk are high priority needs, there are many needs in El Cajon. All of the options were selected by multiple respondents. Dog park was the option selected least frequently, likely because El Cajon has a large dog park and agility area.

QUESTIONS 4 AND 5

Questions 4 and 5 provided an opportunity for respondents to provide ideas about opportunities in their neighborhoods and to provide additional comments.

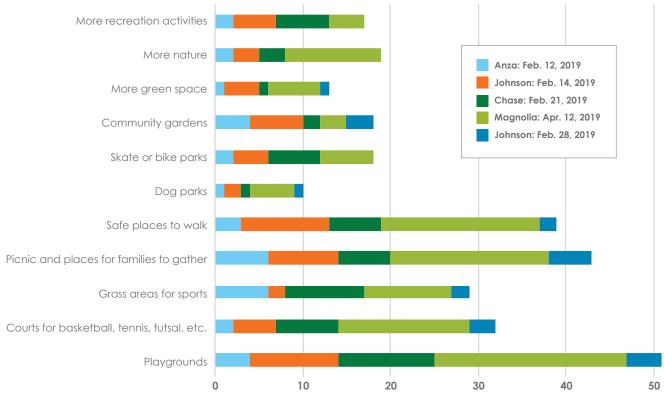
People mentioned sites such as vacant lots, schools such as Magnolia, and their concerns about safety. Many indicated a need for safe places for kids to play, a desire for larger parks (such as Harry Griffen), and



Table 4: Adult Responses to Question 3

3. What are the greatest recreation needs in our city?	Total
Playgrounds	51
Courts for basktball, tennis, futsal, etc.	32
Grass areas for sports	29
Picnic and places for families to gather	43
Safe places to walk	39
Dog parks	10
Skate or bike parks	18
Community gardens	18
No time/ ability to recreate	4
More green space	13
More nature	19
More recreation activities	17

interest in small improvements such as seating and lighting. The full set of returned questionnaires is included in the Appendix, where comments can be reviewed in detail.



"MY DREAM PARK"

Elementary school children at four schools created 224 drawings of "My Dream Park" and 27 students wrote essays accompanied by drawings. These are scanned and included in the Appendix. A review of these drawings shows the creativity of El Cajon's youth in imagining park improvements, showing a range of ideas for playgrounds and fields with a wide variety of amenities and lots of green.















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03 POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

This chapter describes eight potential solutions to providing parks and recreation in areas currently lacking access to a park within a 10-minute walk. These approaches are tailored to El Cajon's land use and development patterns and community priorities, and several solutions may be combined. Each approach is defined, and the rest of the chapter provides additional examples and case studies to illustrate how other communities have applied the solution.

i. ACQUIRING PARK LAND

Though El Cajon is largely built out, there are a few vacant parcels in or near the city that may provide opportunities for future park land acquisition. In addition, other desirable properties may come up for sale or may be secured by a long-term lease. Various potential mechanisms for land acquisition, described below, can be considered depending on circumstances.

Direct Purchase or Fee Simple Acquisition

In many cases, a public agency purchases real property from a willing seller at fair market value. A fee simple purchase transfers full ownership of the property, including the underlying title, to another party.

Easement

An easement is a partial interest in real property. Easements are especially applicable in situations where the landowner is not interested in selling their land but is willing to place an easement on the property to dedicate the land for a specific purpose, in this case typically for park, recreation, conservation or trail purposes. The terms of an easement agreement are negotiated between the private landowner and the public agency to tailor the easement to needs of each party. Easements may be acquired by direct purchase or by donation.

Real Property Donations

A willing property owner may give real estate or grant an easement as a donation to a public agency. In some cases, a property owner may sell the property at less than fair market value to a public entity. This is called a "bargain sale" and the property owner may deduct the value donated from their federal taxes. A nonprofit organization is often involved in cases where a bargain sale occurs.

Life Estate

In some cases, a property owner may donate or sell property to a public agency but retain a life estate, through which they retain the right to use the property for the duration of their life.

Land Dedication

Dedication of real estate is a required donation of real property to a government for a public purpose, typically resulting from a land use or entitlement process. For example, cities sometimes require a property owner to dedicate right-of-way to widen as street or require dedication of park land as part of a subdivision process through Quimby Act provisions.

Land Trust

A land trust is an agreement through which one party (the trustee) agrees to hold ownership of a piece of property for the benefit of another party (the beneficiary). A land trust can also involve a private nonprofit organization tha—as all or part of its mission—actively works to protect land, often for conservation or affordable housing purposes.

Land Swap

A land swap is a simultaneous, mutual transfer of real property between willing parties.

Long Term Lease

A lease is a legal agreement granting the use of a property in exchange for payment for a specified length of time. For parks and recreation purposes, the payment may be nominal (e.g, \$1 per year) and the term is often long. The custom of using 99 years as the term for long-term leases comes from historic common law.

Conditions of Approval

Public agencies can require public use in some cases as a condition of approval of a land use action. Sometimes, public use is provided through dedication or easement to a public agency, and sometimes the private property owner retains ownership but must provide public access. San Francisco's Privately Owned Public Open Spaces are an example of this.

ii. CREATING SMALL-FOOTPRINT PARKS

Many of El Cajon's existing parks are small, sometimes smaller than a typical residential lot. Future opportunities for park development are likely to occur on small sites as well. Through good design, small-footprint parks can layer in a variety of uses and different amenities to provide a rich visitor experience. Case studies of successful small footprint parks illustrate how other communities have made the most of very small sites.





Doyle Hollis Park, Emeryville

Doyle Hollis Park is a 1.5-acre park built on a former warehouse and parking lot. The site is adjacent to a heavily used regional bike path in a neighborhood that is home to both multifamily housing and businesses. The park includes stormwater facilities, a basketball court, amphitheater, picnic tables, children's play area, art fountain, and public restroom. Pathways, engaging landscapes, and small grassy areas invite park users to make the most out of this small park.

Hing Hay Park, Seattle

Hing Hay Park sits on less than 1 acre in Seattle's Chinatown International District. Redesigned in 2017, the park now includes a variety of small and flexible features including movable seating, outdoor fitness equipment, café tables, ping pong tables, concrete seat walls, performance space, and a plaza. The plaza, with pole sleeves and court linework, can be transformed into a badminton and pickleball court. The park has become a community hub supporting day-to-day activities as well as a place for celebrations and events.





CITY OI

Sterling Barnhart Park, Cupertino

This 0.6-acre park serves a residential neighborhood in Cupertino that has been relatively underserved by parkland. The park includes a playground, benches, chessboard tables, small open lawn, and picnic tables. The park is next to a popular a multiuse path.

iii. ADDING SMALL-SCALE PARK AMENITIES

There are several opportunities in El Cajon to add park amenities to existing parks to add variety, interest, and recreation value—enhancing the quality of nearby recreation opportunities. Examples of potential smallscale park amenities are noted.



Outdoor reading room



Picnic tololes



Rock climbing tower









iv. REPURPOSING UNDER-PERFORMING SPACES

New spaces for parks and recreation may be hiding in plain sight. Cities are re-imagining underutilized or closed golf courses, airports, and industrial facilities. Many of these facilities, with large, open, flat spaces, are compatible with parks and recreation uses. Some of these sites are being re-naturalized and others repurposed into sports facilities or arts and culture venues.

Within El Cajon, there may be spaces and places that are no longer are needed for their original purpose. These may be either public or privatelyowned spaces that are suitable for recreation uses. Three case studies illustrate the creativity and variety other communities have taken in their approaches to repurposing spaces for park land.

Ricardo Lara Linear Park, Lynnwood, California

Built in the early 1990s, the I-105 freeway created a physical and visual barrier that divided the Lynnwood community. A decade later, more than five acres of vacant lots adjacent to an unused freeway embankment were transformed into a mile-long, 45-foot wide park.

In a community that lacks good access to parks, Ricardo Lara Park offers a variety of recreation experiences including: dog park, fitness stations, play structures, community gardening and education, and places to sit and relax with artwork and landscaping. The park improves connectivity between the adjacent neighborhoods and connects with the regional LARIO Bike Trail.

The park was developed with stormwater management funds from the State Water Board (Proposition 84).



Airport Park, Santa Monica, California

The City of Santa Monica has incrementally transformed the Santa Monica airport into a city park. In 2015, 4 acres of the airport were transformed into a park with an off-leash dog area, playground, a synthetic turf sports field, picnic tables with BBQ grills, a 0.6-mile walking loop, 118 parking spaces and bike racks and free City wi-fi. As of Spring 2019, the City is preparing to add 12 acres to the park, including sports fields, a multipurpose great field, a jogging track, a community garden, and an elevated berm to view airplanes take-offs and landings.

The airport is scheduled to close in 2028, at which point Airport Park advocates hope the entire 227-acre airport will be transformed into park space.





Rose City Futsal, Portland, Oregon

Community members came together and converted a 30,000-square-foot former Standard TV & Appliance outlet into a three full-size futsal fields and a pub.

The project was founded in 2013 by ten **Portland** families passionate about soccer who wanted to create a public-private space where soccer fans and players could celebrate. The fieldhouse is **home to** adult and youth, pick-up games, skill-**building** events, and is **rentable**.

v. JOINT USE WITH SCHOOLS

El Cajon has joint use agreements in place and an excellent relationship with its school districts. Expanding recreation opportunities through joint use has strong potential in El Cajon, where there is a track record of success and the presence of additional public school sites in several areas that currently lack park access.



The New York City Department of Parks and Recreation's (DPR) Schoolyards to Playgrounds Program converts elementary and middle school schoolyards to community playgrounds for use by the general public offer school hours, on the weekends, and during school breaks. The program is a cornerstone of Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg's long-term sustainability plan, PlaNYC, and helps fulfill the goal of bringing all New Yorkers within a 10-minute, half-mile walk of a park by 2030.

The program made the most of an existing and underutilized asset—schoolyards— by improving 260 sites across New York City, 71 of which were identified as priority improvements sites. There are hundreds, if not thousands of these spaces around the city that are closed every weekend, all summer, and every evening. In some cases, just unlocking the gates opens an equipped playground. Other sites require renovations to make them suitable for community use.

Austin School Parks Pilot Project, Texas

The Green School Parks Initiative will create **autobor** learning environments on 24 Austin Independent School District school campuses in neighborhoods with limited park access. These school parks will serve as **autobor** classrooms, providing garden-based education and play as a means to integrate nature experiences into school curriculum. The school parks will also serve the surrounding community during out-of-school time where families can play, explore and connect with nature in a safe, convenient space. The Green School Park **Program** is a citywide initiative of the Austin Connecting **Children** to Nature (ACCN) Program. Barrington Elementary School was the City's first "Green School Park."





Meadow Crest Playground, Renton, Washington

Meadow Crest playground leverages the location of a City of Renton park next to two public schools. Rather than building a new City park playground on the other side of a fence from a school playground, the City and School District removed the fence. A new inclusive playground was developed that includes play areas specifically designed for two-to five-year-olds, five to-12year-olds, and all ages. The playground jointly serves the adjacent schools and the greater Renton community. If is open to the public Monday through Thursday after 4:30 p.m., and all day Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, and during Renton School District breaks and holidays.

vi. JOINT USE WITH PUBLIC FACILITIES

Public facilities (fire stations, libraries, etc.) and public infrastructure (substations, water supply facilities, etc.) can offer land that can be used recreation by adding park amenities. El Cajon's Fire Station Park is an example of this approach. Examples are provided for these types of joint-use opportunities.





Opened in 2006, Roosevelt Park in Anaheim is also a substation for Anaheim Public Utilities. As the first underground substation in the U.S., this utility infrastructure project made use of new technology that allowed it to be subsurface. The project created a new two-acre park while adding a substation to serve 25,000 residential customers.

Harry Griffen Park, La Mesa and El Cajon, California

Harry Griffen Park was designed around Helix Water District's largest water storage tank, which is located under an open field in the park. This storage tank was completed in 1978 on the site of Helix's reservoir to expand storage capacity. By design, the tank is located underground so a regional park could be built on top. As part of the project, Helix worked with local public agencies to create a Joint Powers Authority to form, fund, operate and maintain Harry Griffen Park, working with Grossmont Union High School District, the County of San Diego and the cities of El Cajon and La Mesa.



vii. RETHINKING STREETS

Streets, public rights-of-way and parking lots typically take up 30 percent of the land area in American cities. Rethinking how streets are used offers tremendous potential to expand park access. Three examples are highlighted that illustrate how other communities have reconsidered their transportation infrastructure.



em

rome to H

In 1968, San Antonio celebrated its 250th birthday with HemisFair '68, an international exhibition built on a 92-acre site on the southwestern edge of Downtown. Part of a neighborhood was demolished and streets were removed, creating long superblocks. After the fair, some structures were demolished, others left vacant. The area has struggled to recover.

In 2010, the community decided to consolidate the on ramps and travel lanes, reduce the width of a roadway from 14 feet to 11 feet, reduce speeds to 35 miles per hour, and add a two-way bike lane on the west side of the road. That change resulted in three times as much parkland, and bicycle and pedestrian connections through the park and to the River Walk.

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30



Bell Street Park, Seattle, Washington

Seattle transformed a 4-block street section into a vibrant, safe and green public space. Bell Street Park is a park—in a street. Street and park materials are woven into a wall-to-wall tapestry of shared space with meandering paving, seating and planting forming a unifying circuitry. It's an outdoor living room for residents, while still serving cars, buses, bic ycles and emergency vehicles. On summer weekends, buses don't run on the street, leaving space for vendors, music and dancing, other entertainment, and general mingling and running around. This is the first section of a planned park corridor that will eventually run all the way from South Lake Union to Elliott Bay.



The City of Morgan Hill, transformed an underutilized small surface parking lot in its quaint downtown into a temporary park. A simple and low-cost arrangement of turf, colorful seating made by local artists, and foam blocks was a big hit with the community. The temporary park became a gathering place for people shopping, dining, and working downtown. Since the debut of the first pop-up park, the City has opened a new pop-up park on another underutilized Downtown parking lot. This temporary park includes new amenities: bike racks, benches, lighting, chalk boards, a youth library, and a donated grand piano. This pop-up park is sponsored by local businesses and community members.



viii. FLEXIBLE PROGRAMMING

El Cajon has established its own mobile recreation program in a newly repurposed City land survey vehicle now known as the #RecSquad. Recreation programming can provide recreation opportunities in places that lack parks, helping to fill gaps in park access. An example of a mobile recreation program is noted below.



BREC on the Geaux is a traveling recreation program that brings recreational ac tivities to "play deserts" in East Baton Rouge Parish. The program is operated from colorful, 14foot box trucks loaded with a variety of equipment and games for all ages, including cardio hula hoop, jump ropes, trampolines, medicine/fitness balls and more.

BREC on the Geaux travels to community parks during school holidays, to schools during recess, and to schools and housing complexes after school hours, bringing equipment and staff to lead activities. The vans can also be rented for private events held at BREC facilities or approved public locations. The program is run by BREC, the parks and recreation provider for East Baton Rouge Parish with support from private foundations.



04 RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION

Improving Park Quality

Public engagement results indicate that El Cajon residents value the variety of recreation opportunities provided at larger sites such as Renette and Harry Griffen Parks. Though there are areas of El Cajon that have a park within a 10-minute park, many parks are small and have few amenities. This means the quality of the park and its recreation value may be lower than desired. Though most of El Cajon's parks are small, additional small-scale amenities can be added to improve their recreation value. In Chapter 3, Sections *ii. Creating Small-footprint Parks* and *iii. Adding Small-scale Park Amenities* illustrate potential ways to improve existing parks.

In particular, El Cajon should prioritize "high need" neighborhoods, as shown in ParkServe™ and parks that do not have community centers for park quality enhancements.



Filling Gaps in 10-Minute Walk Access

Table 5 delineates "Park Search Areas" and keys each with an identifying letter. The "Park Search Areas" are defined geographies with opportunities for park enhancements that could serve surrounding areas that lack a park within a 10-minute walk.

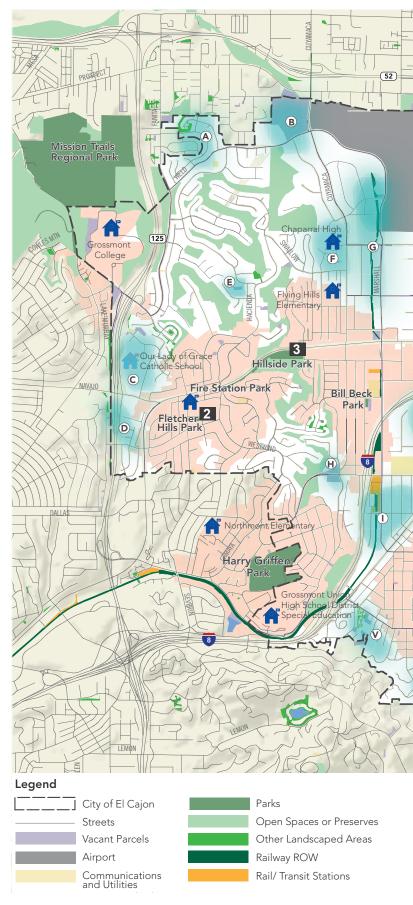
Table 5: Park Search Areas

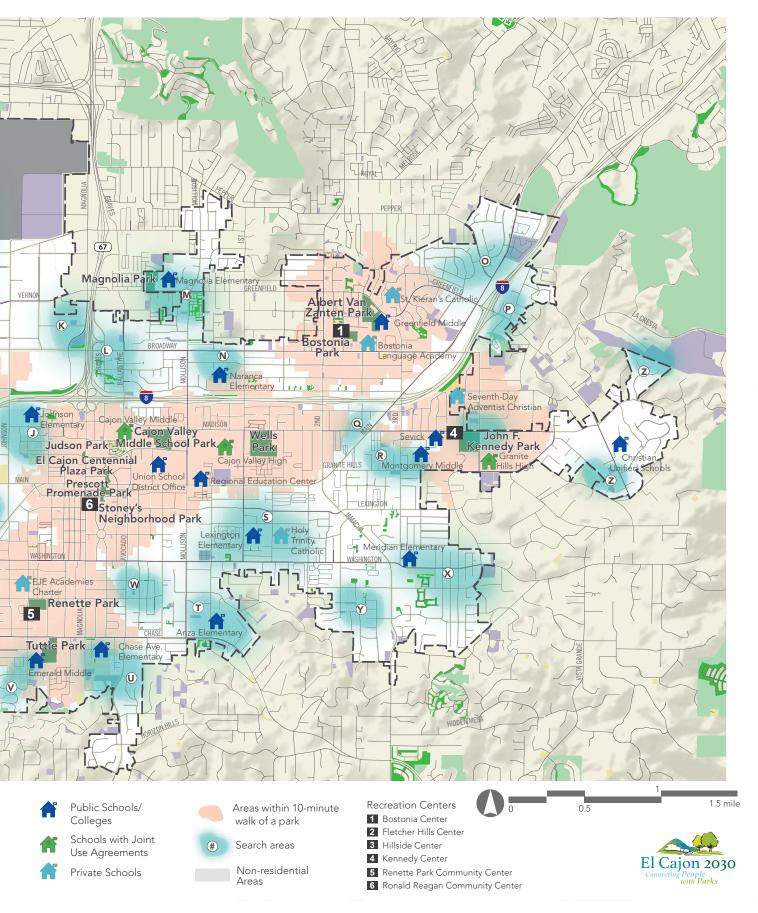
Park Search Area	Description	Recommendations
A	North of Weld, Search Area A is located in the northwest corner of El Cajon. It is disconnected from other areas, but is relatively small.	Explore using the "Other Landscaped Area" within the neighborhood for park use. Consider improved bike and pedestrian connections to Grossmont College or Mission Trails Regional Park. Another alternative is to serve the area with flexible programming.
В	Search Area B is located directly west of the airport and encompasses a vacant parcel	Evaluate acquiring all or part of the vacant parcel for park use. However, this land is not situated well to make significant improvements in 10-minute walk access. Due to the location at the northernmost edge of El Cajon, connectivity to this site will be critical to its success as a public park.
С	Search Area C is located on the west boundary of El Cajon, north of Navajo (a collector street).	Consider adding park amenities to one of the small landscaped areas. Explore a partnership with Our Lady of Grace Catholic School. Improve bike and pedestrian connections to Grossmont College.
D	Search Area D is located south of Navajo and Search Area C.	Consider creating stronger pedestrian connections across Navajo. Explore a partnership to transform part of a private parking lot for park use.
E	Search Area E is located in the middle of a neighborhood with open space, but no formal park. The neighborhood is located in a hilly area and is characterized by larger lots with private yard space.	Secure formal public access to the open space lands. Explore securing the vacant parcel for park use.
F	Search Area F is located around Chaparral High School.	Secure formal public access to the open space lands. Explore a school park at Flying Hills Elementary or Chaparral High School.
G	Search Area G is in a commercial/ industrial area.	Explore the feasibility of trail or park improvements in the railroad R.O.W., designed to serve the immediate area and potentially to be connected to neighborhoods to the west and south.
н	Search Area H is located just outside the 10-minute walksheds for Bill Beck, Harry Griffen, Fire Station and Fletcher Hills Parks.	Improve bike and pedestrian connections, especially to Harry Griffen Park. Secure formal public access to the open space lands. Explore acquisition of vacant parcels along Main for park use.
I	Search Area I is located to the east of I-8 and is outside the 10-minute walkshed of Renette Park and several smaller parks.	Improve bike and pedestrian connections to Renette Park. Explore the railroad R.O.W. for linear park opportunities, providing access along Palm Ave.
J	Search Area J is wrapped by I-8 to the west and north.	Explore a school park at Johnson Elementary. Explore whether park improvements could be added to the I-8 R.O.W., similar to the Lynnwood case study.

Table 5: Park Search Areas continued

Park Search Area	Description	Recommendations
К	Search Area K is an industrial and commercially zoned area west of 67.	Explore whether vacant parcels in this area, if acquired for park use, could improve park access for areas east of 67, if pedestrian crossing improvements were implemented.
L	Search Area L includes higher density residential areas that are isolated by I-8 from parks to the south.	Convert "other landscaped areas" land to park use.
м	Search Area M is located in the higher density residential neighborhood around Magnolia Elementary School.	Serve the area with a school park at Magnolia Elementary. Explore acquisition of vacant land for development of a park, even if it is outside El Cajon city limits. Explore converting "other landscaped areas" to park use.
N	Search Area N includes the neighborhood north of I-8, East of 67 and south of Broadway.	Explore a school park at Naranca Elementary. Explore suitability of "other landscaped areas" for integration of park amenities and uses. Improve bike and pedestrian connections to Bostonia Recreation Center.
0	Search Area O is a primarily residential area on the northeast end of El Cajon, north of Greenfield.	Explore acquiring vacant land for park use. Improve bike and pedestrian connections to Van Zanten Park and to the open space lands east of El Cajon.
Р	Located east of I-8, Search Area P is cut off from other neighborhoods.	Explore partnerships with other jurisdictions to acquire park land outside El Cajon city limits that would serve this area.
Q	The neighborhood around Search Area Q is characterized by higher density residences.	Improve bike and pedestrian connectivity to Wells Park and Kennedy Park. Actively pursue a parcel north of Main for park use.
R	Search Area R is a residential area identified as high need in ParkScore™.	Explore a school park at Sevick or Montgomery Middle. Improve bike and pedestrian connectivity to Kennedy Park.
S	Search Area S is a residential area identified as high need in ParkScore™.	Explore a school park at Lexington Elementary or with Holy Trinity Catholic.
Т	This higher density Search Area is also identified as high need in ParkScore™.	Explore a school park at Anza Elementary. Explore suitability of "other landscaped areas" for integration of park amenities and uses.
U	Search Area U is characterized by single family homes with private yard space.	Explore a school park at Chase Elementary.
V	Search Area V includes residential areas south of Chase Avenue and outside a 10-minute walk from Tuttle Park.	Improve pedestrian and bike connections to Tuttle Park from Search Area V. Explore acquiring vacant land or converting "other landscaped areas" to park uses.
w	Search Area W is a residential neighborhood located between Washington and Chase.	Improve pedestrian and bike connections to Renette Park from Search Area Q. Improve connections to Anza Elementary if a school park is established there. Explore conversion of "other landscaped areas" to park uses.
X	Search Area X is located east of Jamacha/2nd Street, on the eastern end of El Cajon.	Explore a school park at Meridian Elementary. Consider conversion of "other open space lands" to a network of parks.
Y	Search Area Y is located south of Washington on the east side of El Cajon.	Explore the suitability of "other open space lands" for park uses.
Z	Search Area Z is located on the east end of El Cajon.	Explore partnerships with other jurisdictions to acquire park land outside El Cajon city limits that would serve this area. Consider a partnership with Christian Unified Schools for public park access.

Figure 7: Park Search Areas





Action Plan

With 26 areas in need of park service and additional parks in need of improvements and/or added facilities to enhance their quality, the City of El Cajon will have to prioritize investments. The following actions should be initiated to address priority needs.

Apply for California Proposition 68 funding for park improvements. Staff will receive some Proposition 68 funds to address park improvement needs. The City is also preparing to submit an application for additional Proposition 68 grant funding that rates applicants based on their existing level of service and park deficiencies, including areas without access to any type of park land within a 10-minute walk. These funds will help enhance the park system for El Cajon residents. **Implement Magnolia Elementary School Park.** El Cajon has identified school park land at Magnolia Elementary, a high priority improvement in a high need area of El Cajon. The City should proceed with park development, adding amenities to complement the outdoor recreation options at the school.

Negotiate additional joint use agreements with schools. A number of schools are especially welllocated to expand 10-minute walk access in El Cajon, if joint use agreements could be established.

Implement #RecSquad mobile programming.

Develop an approach to pilot #RecSquad mobile programming at sites located within areas lacking 10-minute walk access to a park, such as in housing complex communal spaces, on temporarily closed streets or at school or non-profit organization sites. Evaluate after the first season of implementation and adjust approach as warranted.





Work with the City of San Diego to improve trail access to Mission Trails Regional Park from El Cajon.

At 5,800 acres, Mission Trails Regional Park is a tremendous asset for El Cajon residents. For residents in the northwest corner of El Cajon, the La Mesa trail access near Grossmont College allows for pedestrian and bike access to the park. Increasing awareness of this access and further enhancing it has great potential to improve recreation access for El Cajon residents.

Coordinate with the Stormwater Division in Public Works and the San Diego River Conservancy to explore use of storm drainage infrastructure. El

Cajon's City-owned storm channels offer opportunities for joint use of infrastructure for multiple benefits. Where feasible, recreation and community educational opportunities should be integrated, especially in areas that are "underparked."

Collaborate with Public Works to pilot use of street rights-of-way for recreation. Explore temporary solutions such as parklets and temporary street closures; connectivity improvements for bicyclists and pedestrians including cycletracks and enhanced crossings; and the potential for permanent park and recreation enhancements. **Consult with Caltrans on potential use of I-8 R.O.W. for park enhancements.** Explore feasibility for projects similar to Lynnwood's Ricardo Lara Linear Park.

Reach out to other agencies to discuss potential partnerships for park land acquisition outside of El Cajon city limits. Some vacant parcels sit just outside El Cajon's city limits, but still relatively accessible for some areas that lack 10-minute walk access. El Cajon should initiate discussions with other agencies and entities about partnering to acquire, develop and operate parks in these situations.

Prepare for land acquisition opportunities. Though El Cajon is mostly built out, there are opportunities for land acquisition, whether for a vacant lot or for a property that comes on the market. Sometimes these opportunities come up quickly. El Cajon should establish a monitoring protocol to stay aware of land acquisition opportunities, not only in park deficient areas but also for larger (1/2 acre+) sites anywhere in the City. In addition, the City should identify potential methods to secure funding quickly if needed for earnest money or other acquisition costs.

Update funding mechanisms related to

development. This includes Quimby, in-lieu fees and impact fees as well as potential new sources such as "percent for art" requirements.

UPDATE TO EL CAJON 2030

The Need For An Update

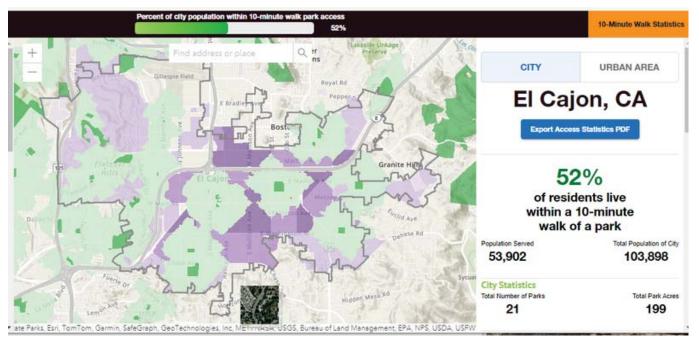
The City of El Cajon Parks & Recreation Department began the accreditation process with the National Recreation & Park Association in 2022. It was discovered that while El Cajon 2030 serves as the department's Parks & Recreation Master Plan, it was missing recent data collection sets. This update amendment meets those requirements and adds suggestions from the community and stakeholder groups. To see a complete list of community members and stakeholder groups, it is best to refer to the department's strategic plan.

There have been eight community meetings hosted at all recreation centers, on evenings and weekends, to ensure the department met state and national standards to apply for any future grants that require community input as part of this master plan development.

The intent is to implement this plan as a

Programmatic Plan. This document serves to guide future renovations as well as park acquisition and development. El Cajon is significantly "underparked," meaning it maintains 1.2 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents, where the national average is 3 acres per 1,000 residents. This is why El Cajon 2030 is still very relevant and a guide for the City as to where it can situate the most effective pocket parks in a City where roughly 99% of the city is built-out.

Pocket Parks, a park that is approximately 10,000 square feet, is the ideal type of park to add to the parks inventory, as it has limited maintenance needs and the primary focus is active recreation. The walkability of El Cajon has increased by 8% since starting the El Cajon 2030 Plan.



Source: Trust for Public Land 2024





The Need for New Data

After carefully analyzing all of the data collected during the creation of El Cajon 2030 in 2019, it was recognized that more data was necessary to also get an understanding of existing facilities and services.



New Surveys

There have been a total of eight community meetings along with community stakeholder one-on-one qualitative interviews. In creating the data collection, we split the online surveys, with the same questions, into two separate surveys to understand the specific audience responding. One online survey set was sent to Cajon Valley Union School District for their families and the other was sent out through our traditional marketing, i.e. social media, email, etc. The following are the questions asked:

1). Are you a resident of the City of El Cajon? Do you have children in your household?

2). In the last 12 months have you or a person in your household participated in a recreation program offered by the City of El Cajon?

3). Are there recreation programs or activities that you would like to see offered?

4). How do you find out about recreation programs and services? Do you have ideas on how the Department can do a better job in creating awareness?

5). What amenities are most important to members in your household?

6). What are the best aspects of strengths of the park and recreation service?

7). What are the weaknesses of the parks and recreation service?

8). In the next 5 years, should the City focus on improving existing facilities, building new facilities, or both?

9). Are there areas of the City without convenient access or with limited access to parks? Where? What do you feel are the top 3 priorities for Parks and Recreation?

10). If you could only select one priority for the City of El Cajon Parks and Recreation Department, what would it be?

11). In 5 years, what one word of phrase would you like to be able to use to describe the El Cajon Parks & Recreation Department?

12). Who would you consider to be partners for the El Cajon Parks & Recreation Department?

13). On a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being the best), how would you rate the following? [Cleanliness of Parks]

14). On a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being the best), how would you rate the following? [Cleanliness of Recreation Centers]

- 15). On a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being the best), how would you rate the following? [Parks Security]
- 16). On a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being the best), how would you rate the following? [Marketing & Communications]
- 17). On a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being the best), how would you rate the following? [Park Amenities]

18). On a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being the best), how would you rate the following? [Accessibility]

19). On a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being the best), how would you rate the following? [Distribution of Parks (locations within the community)]

20). On a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being the best), how would you rate the following? [Quality of Parks]

21). On a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being the best), how would you rate the following? [Quality of Recreation Programming]

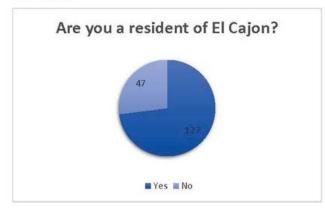
22). On a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being the best), how would you rate the following? [Parks & Recreation Department as a whole]

23). Please share any final thoughts you have regarding the future of the El Cajon Parks & Recreation Department.

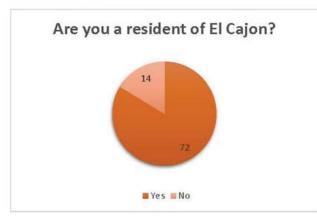


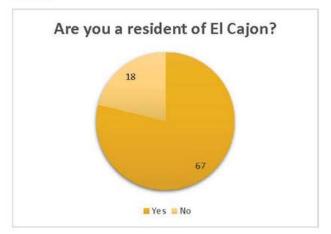
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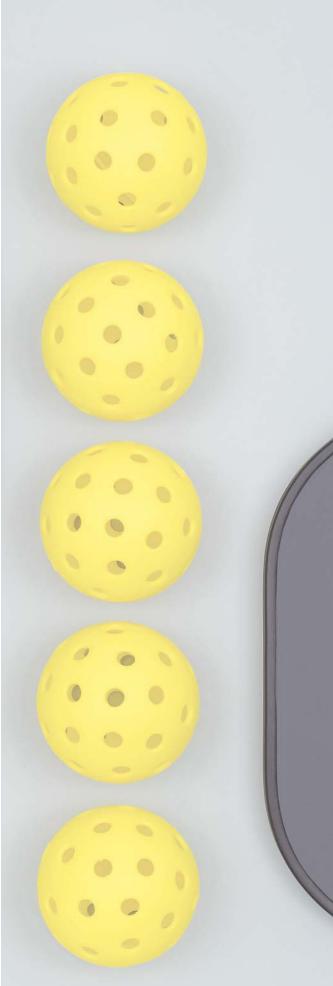
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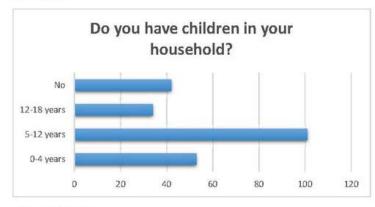
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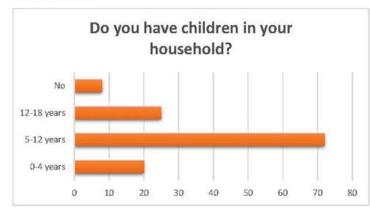


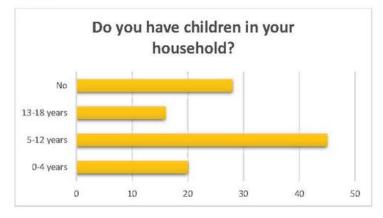




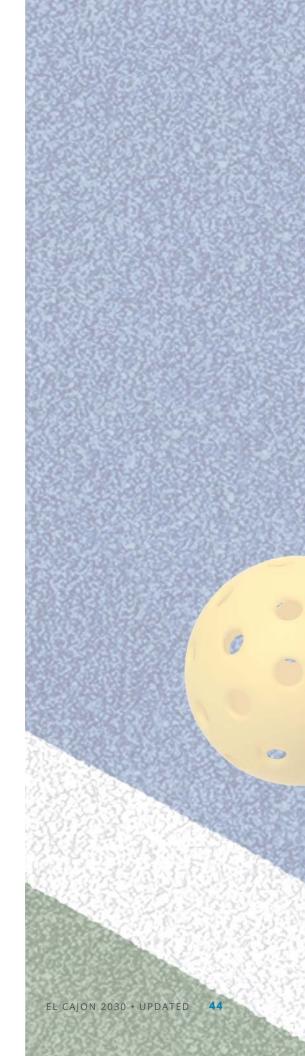


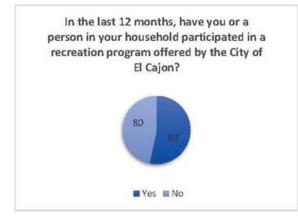
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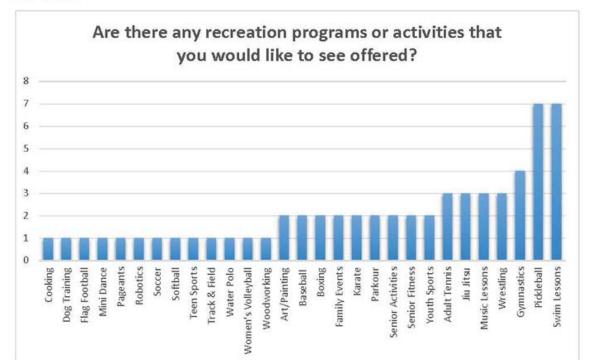






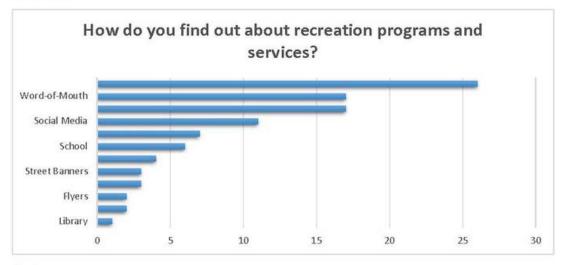


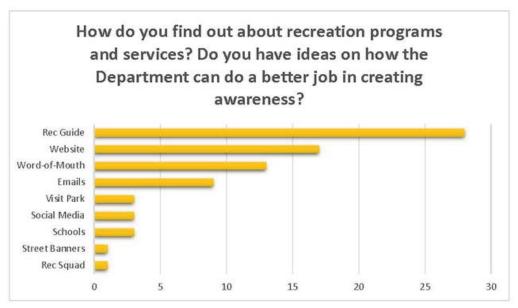








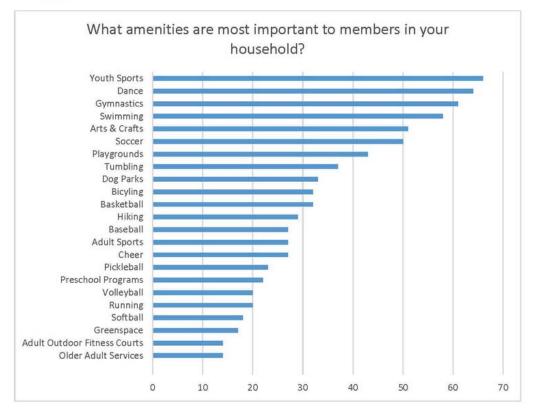








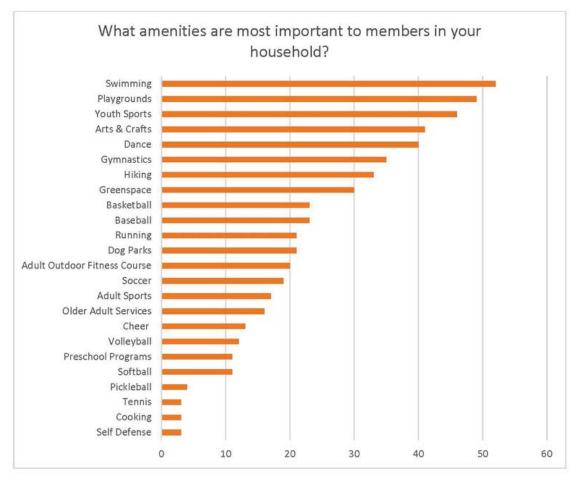






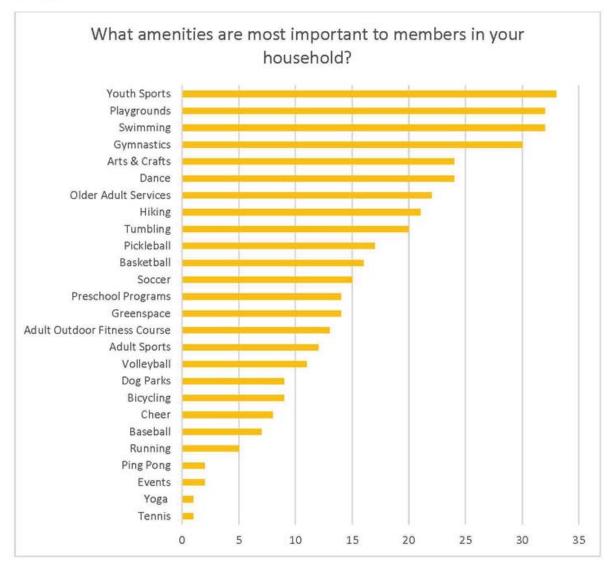


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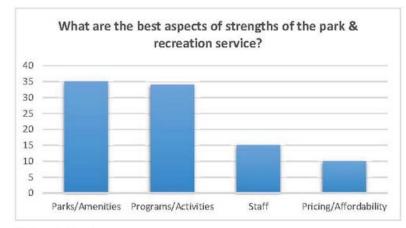




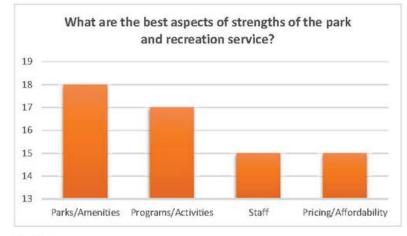


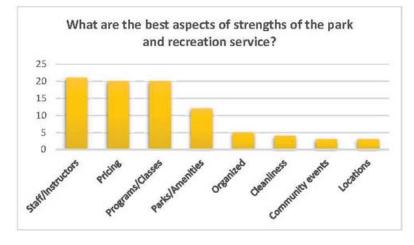






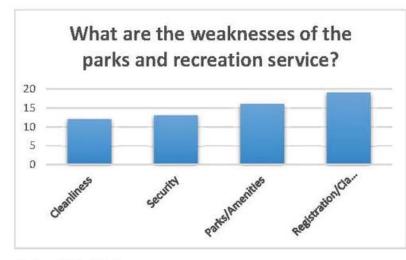
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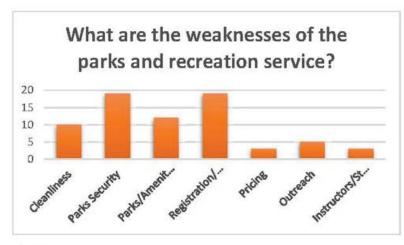


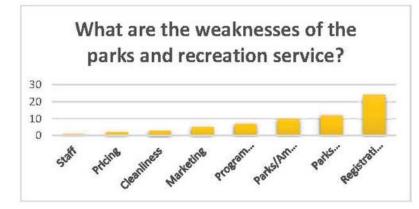






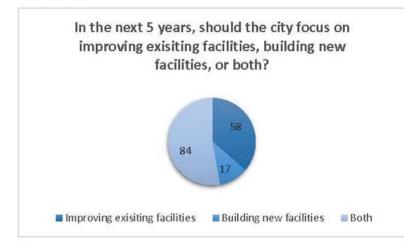
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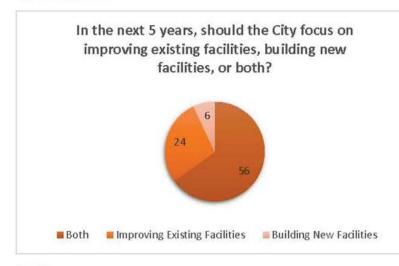


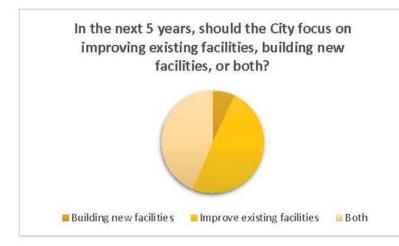






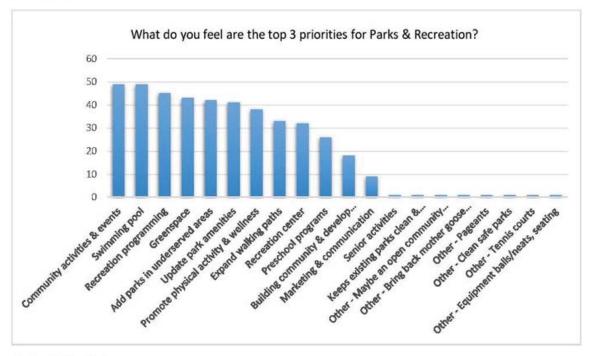
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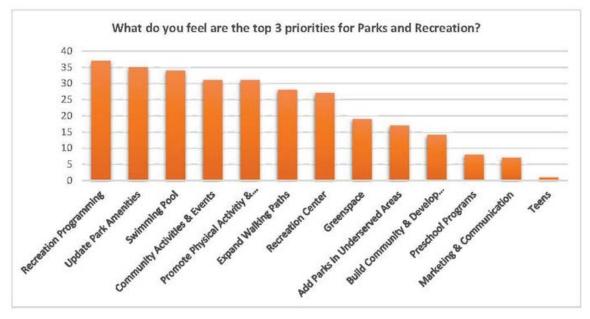




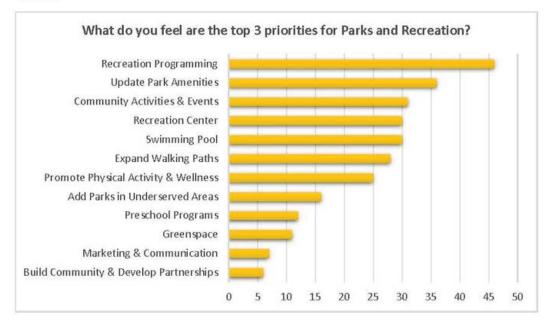




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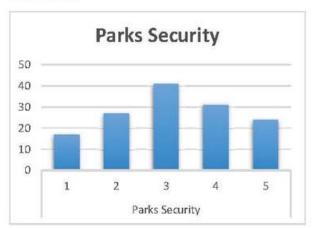
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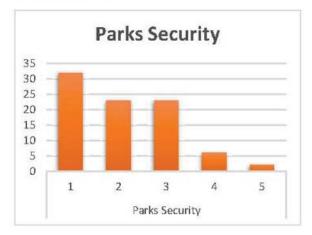


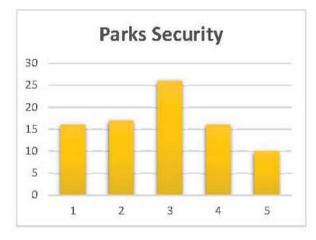






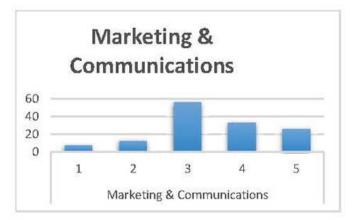
School District





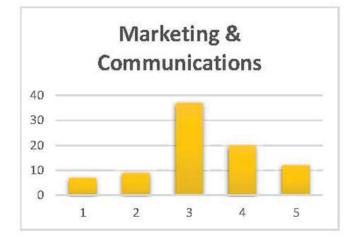






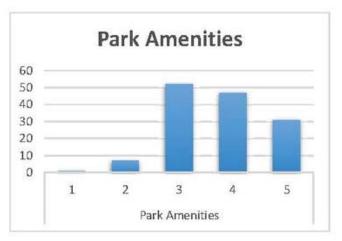
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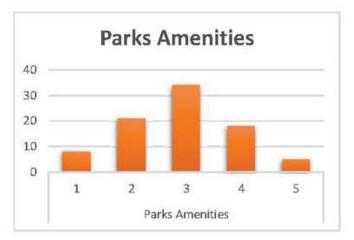


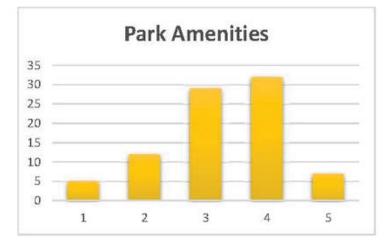






School District



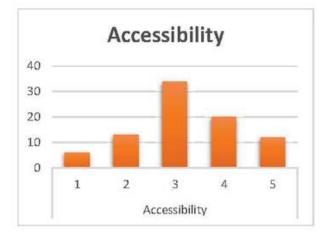


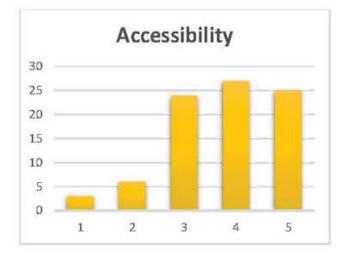






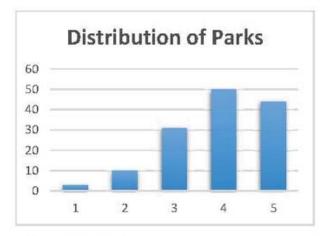
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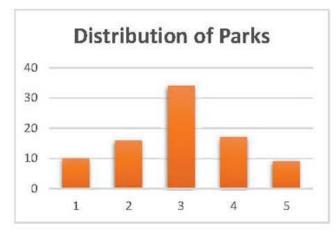


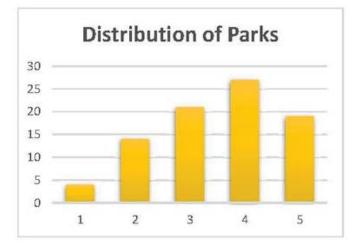






School District











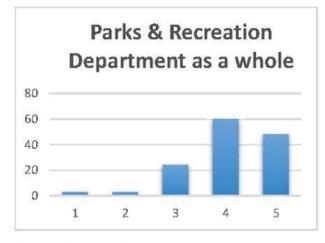
School District



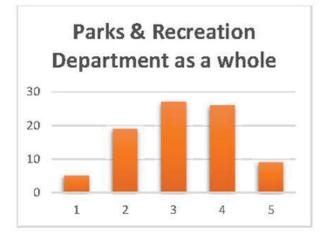


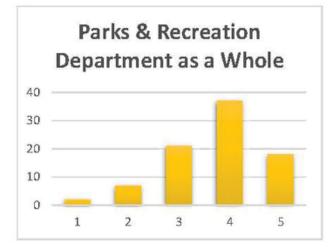






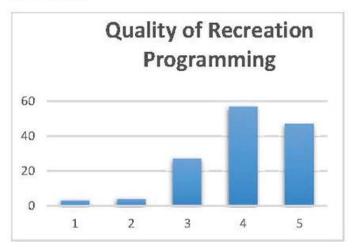
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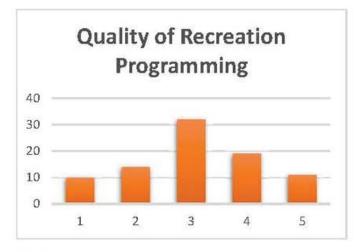








School District









recreation programming

After receiving the survey results regarding all of the recreation programming, the department will update its recreation program plan in the coming years, accounting for all the current and future community input. With pickleball one of the highest priorities, a pickleball complex is planned at Wells Park, which was not on the original El Cajon 2030 Plan.

Conception of the second



fencing around playgrounds

In response to surveys regarding fencing around playgrounds for youth safety, a coordinated response will be included with CIP plans to add fencing around playgrounds that do not currently have them, one fence per year. The remaining playgrounds absent a fence are located at Hillside, Kennedy and Wells Parks and that is the order of priority to place the fences given their immediate proximately to paved road.



shade structures over playgrounds

In response to surveys regarding shade structures at playgrounds for user comfort and safety, a coordinated response will be included with CIP plans to add a shade structure at Wells Park, the last remaining park without a shade structure over its playground.



park benches

Through the surveys, requests for seating next to active recreation areas, such as playgrounds, is consistently requested. Staff will seek a coordinated park bench needs assessment and will move forward adding park benches in active recreation areas where needed.



adopt-a-park program

In response to surveys regarding park cleanliness, the department will seek new adopt-a-park programs where individuals, groups, faith based organizations and non-profits can adopt a city park and offer beautification days each month.



playground surfacing

In response to surveys regarding playground surfacing, the department will prioritize a list of remaining playgrounds to be resurfaced with the long lasting tile surfacing meeting current ASTM standards. The remaining playgrounds are located at Bostonia, Renette and Wells Park.



parks security

Increasing parks security using Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) continues to be an integral part in parks development and renovation. Working with the IT Department and increasing staff's visible parks presence will be a high priority moving forward.



marketing

Utilizing the department's newly formed "Communications" Focus Area Leadership Team (FALT), the department staff will analyze, develop, implement and evaluate a new marketing plan that is evolved to meet the community information needs.



park renovations

Future park renovations will include cost savings evaluations as related to existing lighting in parks and sports fields. Renovations include migration towards LED, full cut-off lighting that is more effective and much more cost savings. Refer to plan El Cajon 2030 for park renovations and public needs assessments for renovating of parks, especially greater need for soccer and pickleball courts.



ceqa & priority

All proposed recreational facility and park improvements will be reviewed in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act. As delineated in the El Cajon 2030 Plan, priority for future park sites will be given to Environmental Justice Communities for programming park and facility improvements.



Bill Wells, Mayor Steve Goble, Council Member Gary Kendrick, Council Member Michelle Metschel, Council Member Phil Ortiz, Council Member

Graham Mitchell, City Manager







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