

CITY OF MISSOULA PARKS, RECREATION, OPEN SPACE, AND TRAILS 2040 MASTER PLAN



Photo courtesy of Five Valleys Land Trust

Executive Summary





What is a PROST Plan?

The Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Trails (PROST) Master Plan is an overarching, 15-year plan that will guide the Parks and Recreation Department in meeting community-driven needs. The document has been developed with community input throughout and in coordination with the Our Missoula 2045 Land Use Plan, which was adopted in Winter 2024. Other important plans, including the Long-Range Transportation Plan, Transit Services Plan, and the Community Health Improvement Plan informed the plan.

While the PROST Plan will serve as the high-level guiding document for the department, it does not take the place of more focused plans for the department including the Conservation Lands Management Plan, Urban Forest Master Plan, the Parks Asset Management Plan, the Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan, and other similar plans. Those plans will go through a separate update process in the future as needed.

Achieving the Community’s Vision Through Planning

Through meaningful community engagement, we have gathered insights into what residents value most. The goals outlined in these plans—such as housing, walkability, sustainability, clean air and water, connectivity, and access to affordable programs and amenities—reflect our shared vision for the future. These goals can be achieved through a series of related actions that bring the plans to life.

Implementing these goals is crucial for realizing our community vision: “Missoula is an inclusive city where all people can live and celebrate meaningful, purposeful, and fulfilling lives, while enjoying unparalleled recreational, cultural, and entrepreneurial opportunities.” By working collaboratively, we can effectively implement this vision over time.

Decision-Making Lenses

In 2023 and updated in 2024, the City of Missoula adopted a Strategic Plan that includes three decision lenses to help guide the implementation of its strategic goals: Climate Sustainability, Mitigation, and Resilience; Equity in Opportunity and Access to Local Government Resources and Lands; and Housing Attainability at all Levels with a Focus on Workforce and Affordability. The PROST Plan embraces these three decision lenses and integrates specific strategies, principles, and concepts to support and advance each area.

Climate Sustainability, Adaptation, and Resilience

The City considers climate and resiliency impacts in all its decisions specifically guided by adopted plans that address:

- 100 percent Clean Electricity
- Carbon Neutral in City Operations
- Carbon Neutral in Community
- Zero Waste
- Building a Resilient Community

Equity in Opportunity and Access to Local Government Resources and Lands

The City addresses holistic, interconnected factors that help build resilient futures while also building an inclusive environment.

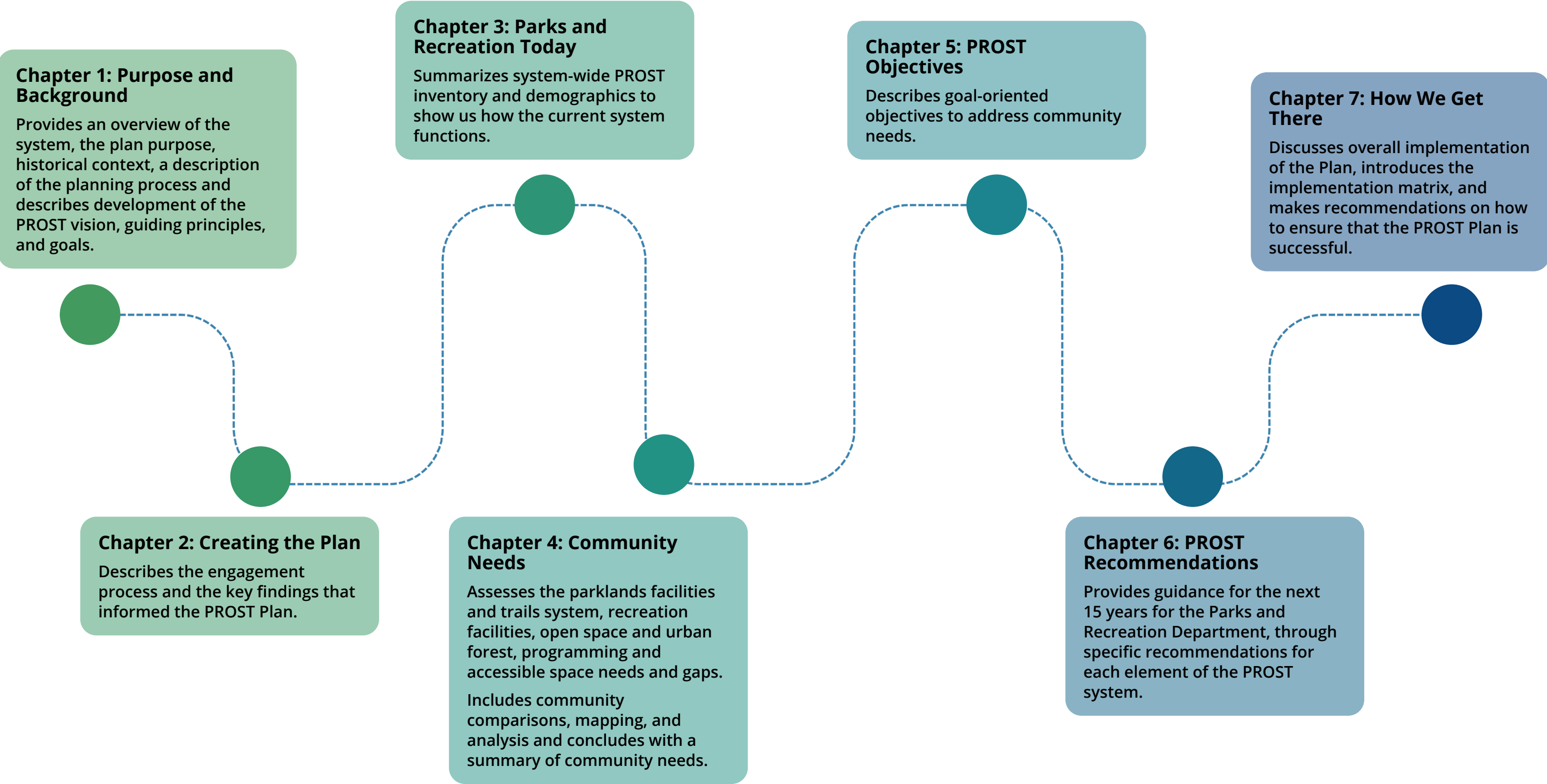
Housing Attainability at all Levels with a Focus on Workforce and Affordability

The City considers opportunities to further its housing goals in all its decisions as articulated in the city’s housing policy “A Place to Call Home”.



How to Read the PROST Plan

The following graphic outlines the chapters within the Plan and a summary of the key takeaways in each chapter.





The Public Engagement Process

The PROST planning process took place between Fall 2023 and Spring 2025. A central element of the PROST planning process was the extensive and consistent community engagement that informed the plan at every stage. This process involved three major rounds of engagement, using multiple methods to gather feedback from residents, technical experts, and key stakeholders. Ultimately, this outreach reached over 5,000 residents through various approaches. Additionally, the effort included:

- Community Working Groups
- 2024 Missoula Parks and Recreation Survey
- Online Community Survey
- Artist-Led Engagement and Historically Underserved Communities Engagement
- Mobile Listening Sessions

- Key Informant Interviews
- Focus Groups
- Community Open Houses
- Online Interactive Map

These inputs, among others, helped to inform findings that steered the PROST plan and its recommendations and policies.

Key Findings

Elevating Quality of Life

Parks and Recreation lands and services are key components of Missoulians’ quality of life and part of what makes Missoula a great place to live. Residents highlighted the need for a more equitable and comprehensive park system, ensuring that all have access to a nearby park that has quality facilities and accessible recreation programs.

Inclusive Community Building

Parks and Recreation lands and services contribute to inclusive community building, including around arts and culture, and there

is a further desire to see more opportunities for community-building spaces, events, and programs. Outreach to underrepresented community members suggested ways that parks and recreation services could work better for their needs, such as providing more spaces for large gatherings, using native plants, using specialty play equipment and public art to represent area culture and history, and incorporating Indigenous place names.

Connecting Neighborhoods and Services

Residents would like to see an increased focus on providing a connected system with trails and greenways moving people to and through parks and recreation opportunities as well as connecting neighborhoods with schools and areas of business via connections to the community and regional trail system. Additionally, the Community Working Group highlighted the rivers running through the valley as a key component of community scale multi-modal transit, opportunities to protect sensitive lands through land management practices, as well as providing increased access to nature.

Having a Year-Round Facility

There is a need for a year-round facility for programming and gathering, especially during the winter, summer, and other times when recreating outside is limited.

Maintaining What We Have

Residents reflected appreciation for high-quality parks, with an emphasis on maintaining existing parks, trails, and open space. While there is a desire for new facilities, there is a clear emphasis on maintaining and upgrading smaller neighborhood parks.

Supporting Climate Action

Residents expressed support for climate-related strategies and projects, such as strategies to mitigate extreme weather and to increase ecosystem services.

Improving Safety

Some residents expressed a concern for safety when visiting local parks or walking or riding on trails, especially after dark. Implementing strategies that promote a sense of community and a feeling of safety, like improved lighting, clear sightlines, strategic landscaping, activation through programming improved amenities as well defining boundaries can be done through physical upgrades and programming.

Increasing Program Variety

There is a desire for a greater variety of programming focusing on teens, middle-aged adults, and older adults, while the City’s childcare and after-school programs remain popular.

Areas of Divided Opinion

There are areas of divided opinion, such as around where e-bikes should be allowed and how to manage dogs in parks and on trails, that will need creative solutions.

PROST VISION STATEMENT

The PROST vision to support the department and meet community needs emerged during a two-year planning process, which included more than 5,000 community connection points, meetings with the community working group and a public engagement committee, and input from technical advisors and staff.

By 2040, Missoula's parks, recreation, open space, trails, trees, and services are more resilient and accessible to our current and growing community while advancing and promoting public health and well-being, contributing to healthy and resilient environments, and fostering a sense of belonging.

Guiding Principles

The community working group, formed of 16 Missoulians who were selected through an open application process and represent a diversity of voices and perspectives guided the plan development and created a set of guiding principles early in the process based on public input as well as the city's vision and decision lenses. The guiding principles were used throughout the process to ensure outcomes maintained the community's core values and intentions.

We believe the PROST Plan will serve the greater Missoula community in the following ways...

Prepare for and welcome people of all ages and abilities with varied programs and facilities year-round, incorporating universal design principles.

Foster a sense of belonging and honor our community by highlighting Missoula's unique natural, historical, social, and cultural features.

Promote mental and physical wellness and social connections through parkland, trails, open space, programs, and facilities.

Ensure access to parks and recreation resources for all, and that they are inclusive, inspiring, safe, and affordable.

Demonstrate and inspire climate action and regenerative sustainability throughout all parks, facilities, open space and trails design, construction, management, and operations.

Support integrated affordable housing, walkable and green streetscapes, and healthy and purposeful green spaces in new and existing developments.

Foster a healthy urban forest and robust natural lands for quality of life, climate resiliency, and wildlife habitat.

Build relationships that continue to advance stewardship and expand services through shared ownership and vision.

Photo courtesy of Five Valleys Land Trust

PLAN GOALS

PROST goals are informed by the guiding principles and lead to the PROST vision. These seven identified goals reflect and distill the guiding principles into actionable statements and inform development of the department goal-based objectives and recommendations described in Chapter 5 and 6. Two of the goals focus on organizational processes while the other five goals support the community's vision for the PROST system and services. These goals were developed through an extensive community outreach process, which is described in more detail in Chapter 2.

Organizational Process Goals



Be Forward-Thinking & Adaptable

Anticipate the needs of Missoula's growing and changing community by creating adaptable and innovative parks, facilities, trails, landscapes, and programs that benefit the community environmentally, socially, culturally, and economically.



Build & Sustain Partnerships

Expand and sustain community partnerships, and work with other departments, agencies, organizations, businesses, and individuals to advance the PROST and greater community vision.

Outcome-Oriented Goals



Elevate Quality of Life

Ensure Missoula's parks, recreation facilities, open spaces, trails, trees, and services continue to contribute to and reflect Missoula's identity with a thriving, equitable, and well-rounded park system.



Support Healthy People

Promote overall wellbeing with increased opportunities for health and wellness, physical fitness, enjoyment of social connections, and increased safety through programs and services.



Foster a Healthy Natural Environment

Strategically protect, maintain, design, and improve a cohesive system of parklands and open spaces that help to mitigate the effects of climate change and provide respite for residents from the urban environment.



Improve Connections & Connectivity

Connect people to each other, to community, to public places, and to the natural environment while ensuring connected ecological systems.



Enhance Maintenance

Provide stewardship of Missoula's parks, open spaces, trails, urban forest, and recreation assets through innovative, regenerative, and effective design combined with maintenance and operations best practices.

Highlighted Recommendations

The following is a “snapshot” of the community’s gaps and needs that are outlined in Chapter 4 and inform the recommendations laid out in Chapter 6.

Urban Park Innovation

New models are needed for higher-density areas with compact, amenity-rich parks accessible to all residents—supporting both housing density and equity goals.

Support for the City’s Urban Forest

Updating the urban tree inventory, diversifying plantings, and strengthening development codes will protect this vital climate infrastructure.



A Walkable and Rollable System

Everyone should be within a 10 minute walk or roll of a park, with a safe route to get there.

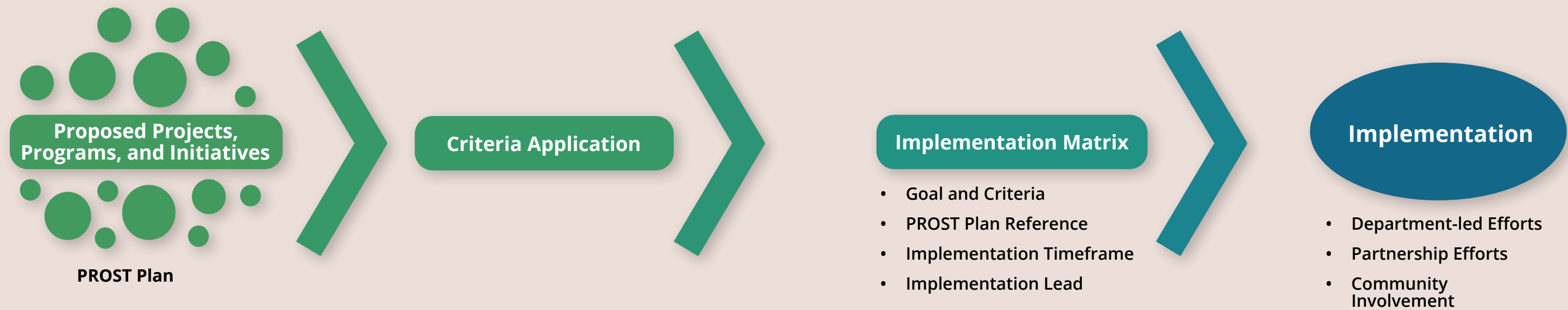
Inclusive Programming

Recreation services need to extend beyond youth to serve adults, seniors, and underserved neighborhoods through diverse offerings.

A Connected Green Network

Developing an integrated system of parks, open spaces and conservation lands, particularly along river corridors, addresses climate resilience while providing equitable nature access.

Implementation Process



Where will we be in 15 years?

The Missoula community has provided direction on priorities and this PROST Master Plan identifies the vision, goals, guiding principles, goals and elements to create a healthy, accessible, equitable, and walkable city. Now it is time to set the plan in motion. The Plan provides information on how to operationalize the plan over time.

The diagram above shows how staff will implement recommendations from the PROST Master Plan and breaks them down into workable steps, using the general criteria and proposed implementation matrix presented in Chapter 7.

This is an iterative process, looking out in increments of five years and then making periodic adjustments to consider changing circumstances and conditions. Every recommendation in the PROST Master Plan may not be included in the first five years of implementation, but all should be addressed over the life of the plan.

Evaluating New Ideas

The pace of innovation and change is unpredictable. Over the next 15 years, new ideas and concepts will come up that were not specifically called out in this Plan. For example, unexpected trends in recreation may generate requests for facilities or programs; scientific breakthroughs might change approaches to managing land; or a major natural event might affect city parks, trails, facilities, or site amenities.

This Master Plan anticipates new ideas, whether proposed by staff, partners, or members of the community. Each new idea should be evaluated for consistency with the PROST Master Plan using the following questions:

- Is the proposal consistent with the PROST vision and goals? *Briefly describe.*
- Which goals and/or objectives does the proposal implement? *Identify.*
- Does the proposal support one or more of the City's decision lenses? *Briefly describe which one(s) and why.*

Supporting Appendices

Additional information is in the plan appendices.

- Appendix A: Parklands Inventory
- Appendix B: Facility Asset Quality Evaluations
- Appendix C: Park Development Guidelines
- Appendix D: GIS Needs Assessment Methodology
- Appendix E: Public Engagement Summary
- Appendix F: Implementation Tools
- Appendix G: Trails Typology
- Appendix H: Urban Area Open Space Plan (under separate cover)