

7.0

Parks, Recreation, Libraries and Open Space



Parks, recreation and open space are vital elements of Westminster's high quality of life. They provide physical relief to urbanization, opportunities for leisure and activity, and preservation of environmentally valuable habitats and landscapes. The city and its inhabitants take pride in the quality and extent of parks, community facilities and open space that comprise the city's physical landscape. This chapter contains the policy framework for the management of Westminster's parks, recreation and open space system to ensure the city's facilities, programs and amenities continue to meet the needs of the community.



The city's expansive network of open space and parks includes Margaret's Pond, above, and the 205-acre City Park, below.

Overview

Over the past 40 years, the city has acquired or built four award-winning recreation centers, over 50 parks including the 205-acre City Park, two new libraries, two award-winning golf courses, an extensive 100-mile trail system and over 3,000 acres of open space throughout the community. Today (2013), this system of parks, recreation and open space occupies approximately 32 percent of the city's land area (Figure 7-1). As a result, most residents can easily access the city's network of trails, parks and open spaces within a ten-minute, or half-mile walk. In fact, the Big Dry Creek Trail, one of the most popular trails in the system, is used by an estimated 100,000 people annually. Likewise, recreational, learning and library services are also a key component of city life. In 2012 alone, over 428,000 patrons visited one of the Westminster library facilities and over 103,000 people participated in recreation classes.

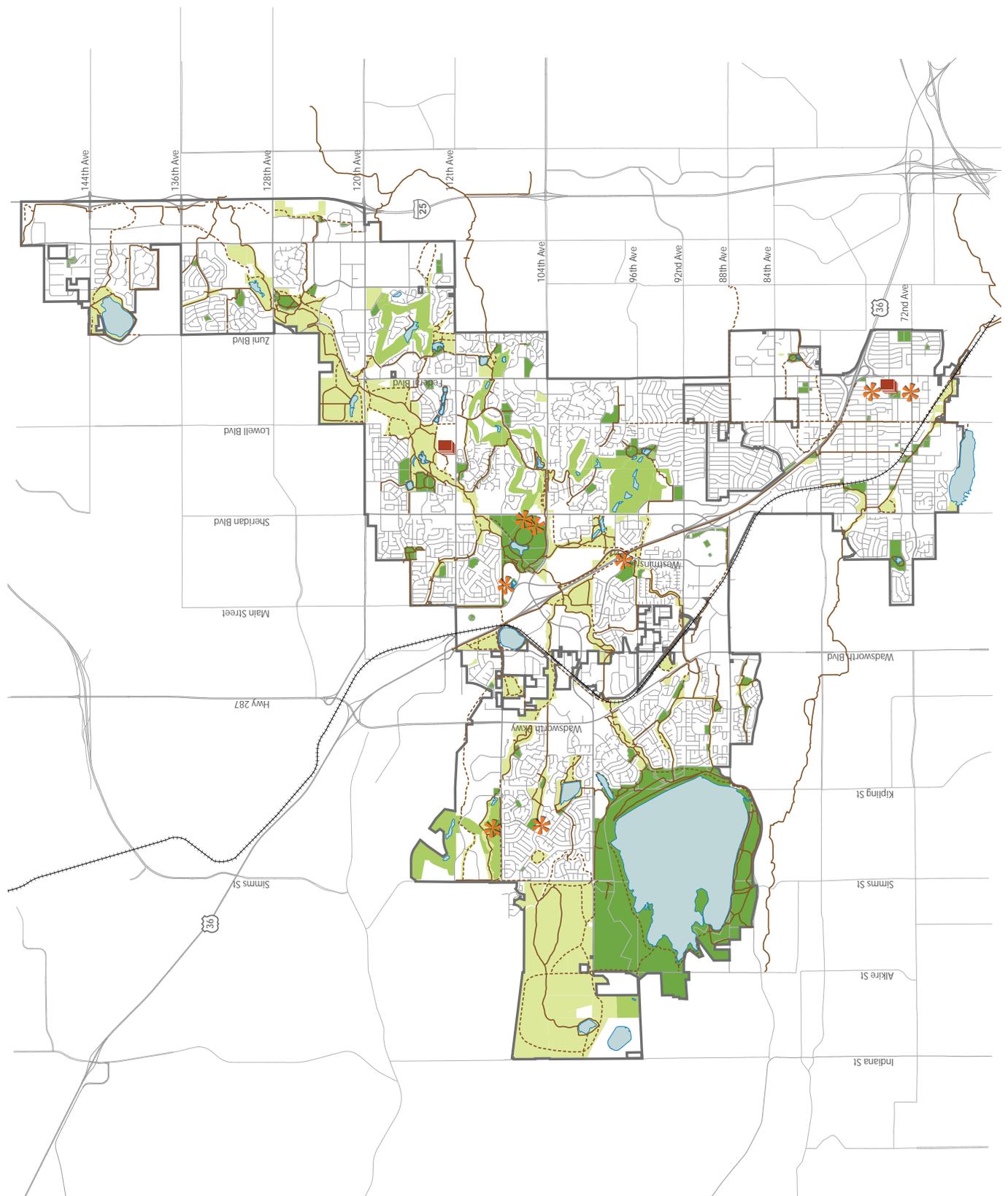
This update to the Comprehensive Plan marks an important paradigm shift for parks and recreation planning. As the city becomes more densely developed, there will be significantly fewer opportunities to physically expand the park and open space network. Instead, optimizing the use of the city's existing parks, recreation facilities and open spaces will be emphasized. Planning will be focused on improving access, maintaining and improving existing facilities, and enhancing the quality and number of active recreation opportunities in the city. Additionally, the city will identify opportunities for providing high quality, well-designed parks and plazas to serve new residents in higher-intensity, mixed-use urban environments like downtown Westminster and the Westminster Station Area. The Plan provides a framework for ensuring that the city's existing and future parks and open spaces continue to provide a high quality of life and experience in the city.

7.1 PARKS AND RECREATION

Parks and recreation facilities provide opportunities for leisure, informal sports and gathering as well as formal recreation, sports activities and programs. Well-designed park spaces can contribute significantly to a city's identity and sense of place. However, these spaces must be accessible, safe and well-maintained, and must meet the needs of the city's changing demographics, activity trends and expectations for quality programming. As the city shifts its focus from expansion to maintenance of the city's parks, recreation facilities and open space these elements of design and function will be increasingly more significant.

Figure 7-1: Parks, Libraries, Recreation & Open Space

- Legend**
- Public Parks
 - City Owned Open Space
 - Golf Courses
 - Existing Trails
 - Proposed Trails
 - City Owned Recreation Facility
 - Library
 - Water
 - City Limits
 - Rail Corridor



Updated 4/13/15



Existing Parks and Recreation

The city currently maintains and operates 53 neighborhood, community and citywide parks, ranging in size from 1.4 to 200 acres and comprising almost 600 acres in total. The city also owns 60 acres of undeveloped parkland. In addition to the city’s neighborhood and community parks, the city operates the 2,327-acre Standley Lake Regional Park and multiple recreation and sports facilities. Westminster’s Parks and Recreation Master Plan provides a complete inventory of the city’s parks and community facilities, which is summarized in Table 7-1. The Parks, Recreation, and Libraries Department’s mission for delivering exceptional services focuses on nature, wellness, and literacy. A major element of the city’s parks and recreation system is the programming of sports and activities for youth, adults, and families. Key program areas include wellness, outdoor, educational enrichment, swimming, and sports activities.

Parks and community facilities are classified based on size, function and characteristics, as described in Table 7-2. Aside from the Standley Lake Regional Park, located at the western edge of the city, the majority of park space in the city is classified as neighborhood and community parks. These parks are an integral part of the city’s high quality of life and are utilized by approximately 75 percent of the city’s residents on a daily basis.



Existing parks include the regional Standley Lake Park, above, and neighborhood parks like Faversham Park, middle, and Bishop Square Park, bottom.

Table 7-1: Parks, Recreation and Open Space Inventory

Facility Type	Quantity	Total Acreage
Parks	54	2919.4
<i>Neighborhood Parks</i>	45	259.5
<i>Community Parks</i>	7	160.0
<i>Citywide Park</i>	1	205.0
<i>Regional Park</i>	1	2327.0
Undeveloped Parklands		60.6
Special Use Facilities	15	484.0
<i>Recreation Centers*</i>	5	30.0
<i>Sports Facilities</i>	2	10.0
<i>Golf Courses</i>	2	414.0
<i>Other Special Use**</i>	6	30.0
Conservation & Open Space		3092.1
<i>Subtotal Public Parks, Open Space and Golf Course Lands</i>		6,482.3
Non-City Owned Golf Courses	2	291
Total Parks, Open Space and Golf Course Lands		6,847.1

**City Park recreation and fitness facility acreage is included in the total 205-acre City Park acreage. An additional 11 acres is undeveloped at the Park Centre/Northeast Resource Center.*

***Refer to the City’s Parks and Recreation Master Plan for more detail.*

Table 7-2: Park and Open Space Typologies

Open Space Typology	Purpose	Description
<i>Conservation and Open Space</i>	Conserves natural amenities, views and habitats, providing opportunity for recreation and passive use.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ranges in character, function and size. • Activities could include hiking, biking, horseback riding and nature study. • Sometimes serve as trail corridors and linear open space or greenways.
<i>Trails</i>	Off-street system of neighborhood-, community- and region-wide trails that extend primarily through parks and open space.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concrete or crusher fine surface. • Used for recreation (jogging, walking, biking, riding) as well as bicycle commuting. • Connects to regional trail system.
<i>Regional Parks</i>	Citywide and regional destination that provides regional recreational activities with a diverse landscape and range of active and passive uses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 50 acres. • Often contain regulation-size sports fields, campgrounds, fishing docks, picnic facilities, trails, boating and/or swimming facilities, visitor centers, recreation facilities and group activity areas. • Also provide wildlife preservation.
<i>Citywide Parks</i>	Serves the entire city population and functions as a civic center for the community with a range of active and passive uses, events and activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ranges from 51 to 250 acres. • Provide active and passive recreation options, recreation facilities, open space and trails, playing fields, play areas, picnic areas, lakes, leisure and fitness centers and venues for events. • Connects to the regional trail system.
<i>Community Parks</i>	Provides opportunities for active recreation for the greater community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typically between 15 and 50 acres. • Often contain multiple sports fields, community buildings, natural areas, and active play areas. • Often linked to regional trail system.
<i>Neighborhood Parks</i>	Provide a focal point and identity for neighborhoods while offering a mix of active and passive recreation space.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0.5 to 15 acres in size (0.5 to 1.5 acres in the TOD Area). • Include a mix of open play areas and passive seating and landscaped areas. • May include tot lots or play areas.



Urban Park and Plaza Classifications

<i>Pocket Parks</i>	Provides small, formal passive open space for both residential and commercial users.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Range from 3,000 square feet up to one acre in size. • Include hardscape and shaded lawn areas, as well as informal seating.
<i>Squares, Plazas, or Greens</i>	Acts as a community gathering and event space.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include space for extensive seating and activity areas for large events. • Provide ample seating in the form of benches, raised planters, steps, and other design elements.

Special Use Facilities

<i>Recreation or Sports Facilities</i>	Serve the leisure, recreational, cultural and fitness needs of the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Range in size from 25,000 to over 100,000 square feet (City Park). • Often contain gyms, fitness/workout components, arts and crafts, aquatics, classes and recreation programs, and meeting rooms. • May also be specific to a single use or sport, such as ice arenas, golf courses, indoor soccer, libraries, cultural amenity, or adult resource centers.
<i>School Parks</i>	Playgrounds and school facilities that are accessible by other members of the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often elementary and middle school facilities that can include playgrounds, ballfields, running tracks and gymnasiums.

Park Demand

As of 2013, Westminster offers 2,965 total acres of combined neighborhood, community, citywide and regional park space, equating to 27 acres for every 1,000 residents, exclusive of the city's open space and golf courses. Although the city's population is expected to increase by approximately 20 percent over the Plan horizon, with the addition of strategically located new park spaces and the city's existing supply, it is expected that the ratio of parks and open space will remain above 22 acres for every 1,000 residents. The city's vast amount of open space, if factored into the ratio, doubles the number of acres available for outdoor recreation and access for every 1,000 residents.



The Jessica Ridgeway Memorial Park is one of the city's most recent park renovations, completed in 2013.



A rendering of the planned Little Dry Creek Park pond, looking east from the south station plaza area towards Federal Boulevard.

Proposed Parks and Improvements

Although the Comprehensive Plan does not specifically designate new parkland, the city will identify sites for potential new parks as part of new and infill development. Provision of well-designed and strategically located new park space is a specific focus for the downtown Westminster and Westminster Station areas. Introduction of smaller pocket parks, squares and plazas will be focused in these higher-intensity, more urban areas in order to provide new residents a range of active and passive outdoor spaces within easy walking distance. The Downtown Specific Plan, adopted in 2014, designates 15.3 acres of new parks and public spaces.

The most significant parks improvement underway is the new Little Dry Creek Drainage and Open Space that encompasses 37.5-acres just south of the Burlington Northern Santa Fe rail corridor between Federal and Lowell boulevards. Additional new parks and improvements to existing facilities are outlined in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, which is slated to be updated in 2016. Specific improvements to park facilities currently under study include increased native planting areas and reduced potable and reclaimed water consumption. Use of reclaimed water to serve the city's public realm is a priority for the city.

Needs Assessments

In addition to planning for new facilities as development occurs, the city conducts periodic surveys and needs assessments to ensure that trends in active and passive recreation uses in the city are met by its parks and recreation system. The most recent Parks, Recreation and Libraries survey, conducted in April of 2013, indicates that the Westminster community prioritizes:

- Protecting the natural environment and promoting environmental sustainability
- Creating and maintaining a more beautiful community
- Providing green, natural spaces within the community with parks, open space and golf courses
- Providing trails and paths for residents to use for exercise and non-motorized transportation
- Providing opportunities for residents to maintain or improve physical health
- Helping revitalize areas of the community through new or enhanced facilities

To complement the survey, an additional Community Survey will be implemented for Parks, Recreation, and Libraries. A more thorough needs assessment will be completed in 2016.



7.2 COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND LIBRARIES

Year-round access to recreation and library services is a key amenity for the Westminster community. The city's active population has a range of indoor and outdoor opportunities for sports and fitness activities as well as educational and enrichment programs. As the city's population increases, maintaining the city's recreational offerings and availability will be essential for ensuring the continued high quality of life that current residents enjoy.

Recreation Facilities

Recreation and Sports Centers

The city operates five recreation centers with a range of uses, including the City Park Recreation and Fitness centers, Swim and Fitness Center, Westview Recreation Center and the MAC Center. These facilities are available to residents and non-residents. Additionally, the city has two sports centers, the Westminster Sports Center indoor soccer facility and the Ice Centre at the Westminster Promenade. The city also has agreements with other organizations and districts to provide residents additional recreational options. These organizations include the Hyland Hills Park and Recreation District, the Adams and Jefferson County Open Space Programs and Great Outdoors Colorado Trust Fund, the Butterfly Pavilion, and the North Metro Arts Alliance to provide recreational and cultural amenities for its citizens and visitors.

Golf Courses

Three public golf courses are located within the city. These include the Heritage at Westmoor Golf Course (18 holes), Legacy Ridge Golf Course (18 holes) and Hyland Hills Golf Course (27 holes). The City of Westminster and Jefferson County developed the Heritage at Westmoor Golf Course in the Westmoor Technology Park, north of 108th Avenue between Wadsworth Parkway and Simms Street in 1999. Development of this course provided a golf amenity in the western portion of the city and accelerated the development of the Westmoor Technology Park as a new major employment center. The Legacy Ridge Golf Course, located south of 104th Avenue between Sheridan and Federal boulevards, provides a high quality golf facility with a regional draw. This course was developed in 1994. Together, these courses comprise 414 acres in the city and accommodate over 72,000 rounds of golf annually.

Finally, the 230-acre Hyland Greens Golf Course, located at approximately 96th Avenue and Sheridan Boulevard, is owned and operated by the Hyland Hills Parks and Recreation District and open to the Westminster public. Additional private golf courses are located in the city, including the Ranch Country Club and Stoney Creek courses.



Community facilities include the Westview Recreation Center, top; City Park Recreation Center, middle; and the Legacy Ridge Golf Course.



Irving Street Library, above, is the most recent addition to the city's library system. College Hill Library, below, is a shared facility with the Front Range Community College.

Libraries

The city operates two libraries—Irving Street Library and College Hill Library, constructed in 2004 and 1998, respectively. The Irving Street Library is located in South Westminster, adjacent to the Irving Street Park on Irving Street at 74th Avenue. The College Hill Library on 112th Avenue is a joint public and academic facility for the city and Front Range Community College. Both libraries offer a variety of services in addition to media rental, including free wifi, computer access, and a variety of youth and adult services and events. These services reflect the ever-evolving technology and cultural needs of the Westminster community. Together, these Libraries serve over 420,000 visitors a year.

Planned Improvements

Planned improvements to city recreational facilities are outlined in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. Facility improvements are focused on renovation and repair of older facilities, such as the recent improvements to the Swim and Fitness Center in 2012. These improvements included a complete renovation of the locker rooms with the addition of family changing rooms; improved handicap accessibility; improvements to the hot tub and sauna; and the addition of an outdoor patio area and splashpad. Future improvements to existing facilities will be similarly focused, and potentially more frequent as use of the facilities increases with new population.

In order to accommodate future population growth in the city, there may be need for an additional recreation facility to maintain the city's existing level of service for recreational facilities and programs. Likewise, new library or event space may be needed, as trends in technology, media and community meeting space evolve. Assessment of the location and timing of new facilities will be conducted in concert with planning for parks and programming to ensure that adequate space is available to serve the city's recreational needs.



7.3 OPEN SPACE AND TRAILS

Westminster's extensive open space system is a key element of its unique setting and identity as a Front Range community. The city has made preservation and protection of natural environments and habitats a priority, integrating their conservation into the physical development of the city. As a result, Westminster's visual landscape is rich with a variety of open spaces, trails, preserved historic sites and scenic vistas.

The city's extensive open space system began with authorization of an open space sales tax in 1985 to purchase land for preservation and natural habitat protection. Westminster was only the second city in Colorado to enact a sales tax for an open space acquisition program (after Boulder). As part of this effort, the city set a goal of preserving 15 percent of the city's overall land area as open space. With over 14 percent of the city's land area preserved as of 2013, the city has begun to transition efforts from acquisition to management and operations that will ensure this vital resource will be preserved and maintained into the future. A more limited open space acquisition program will still continue.

Existing Open Space and Trails

Since 1985, the city has acquired 3,092 acres of open space to be preserved for passive recreational use and protection of natural wildlife habitat. These open space areas can be found throughout the city, as shown in Figure 7-1, but are concentrated in the city's western area near Standley Lake and along drainage ways and irrigation ditches that cross the community, including Walnut Creek, Big Dry Creek, the Farmers' High Line Canal and Little Dry Creek. Preserved open space by creek and natural corridors is summarized in Table 7-3.

Existing open space in the city provides for protection of sensitive habitat areas and wildlife movement corridors, view corridors and preservation of open and rural landscapes. Additionally, the city's open space system provides recreation opportunities such as hiking, biking, fishing, horseback riding and nature study. Many of the city's open spaces are linear connections that follow major creek corridors or serve as buffers between developments. These linear connections allow for an extensive network of trails that play a vital role in the city, linking neighborhoods, parks, schools and employment areas to a citywide and regional trail system. In all, Westminster currently has over 105 miles of trails, as shown on Figure 7-1.

The city's open space and trail systems also connect to the larger regional system, particularly to the west of the city where vast areas of open space are preserved in the City of Boulder, Boulder County, Jefferson County and the Rocky Mountain National Wildlife Refuge.



The city's open spaces are a major asset for the community, providing trails (Big Dry Creek, top), wide open spaces for recreation and passive use (Hyland Ponds) as well as habitat for wildlife (Loon Lake, bottom).



Maintenance and improvements to the city's highly-used trail system are a key focus of the open space program.

Table 7-3: Preserved Open Space by Corridor

<i>Corridor</i>	<i>Acres</i>
Big Dry Creek	982.8
Little Dry Creek	78.5
Walnut Creek	187.2
Farmers' High Line and Niver Canals	150.3
Westminster Hills	1,029.2
McKay Lake	134.6
Hyland Ponds and South Hylands Creek	68.8
Wadsworth Wetlands	19.3
Vogel Pond	44.7
Natural Areas, Water, Trees & Wildlife	284.2
Other Areas	112.5
Total Preserved Open Space	3,092.1

Source: City of Westminster, February 2015.

Planned Improvements

In 2014, the City completed the Open Space Stewardship Plan. This plan identifies priorities for land acquisition and open space management. Future acquisitions will be limited and focused on protecting view sheds, preserving unique natural areas and purchasing properties that will improve trail access throughout the city. Enhancement of the city's open spaces will also be pursued including trail improvements and addition of educational areas in order to attract greater use of the system. However, maintenance and operations of the city's existing open space system will be the primary focus of future iterations of this plan, particularly as use of open space and trail facilities will only increase with the city's projected residential and employment population growth.

The Trails Master Plan identifies trails and connection points along the main trail corridors of Walnut Creek, Big Dry Creek, the Farmers' High Line Canal and Little Dry Creek. This plan was last updated in 2014 and provides a basis for trail connections in both open space and new development in the city. Almost 60 miles of new trail are proposed as part of this plan, as shown in Figure 7-1. These new trail alignments include completion of the Little Dry Creek Trail and other connections to facilitate the Refuge to Refuge Trail. Improvements to the open space and trails system are outlined in these master plans.



7.4 GOALS AND POLICIES

GOALS

- PRLO-G-1** Provide convenient recreational, wellness and literacy opportunities for all Westminster residents.
- PRLO-G-2** Provide new smaller, high quality parks that address the need of high-density and mixed-use developments.
- PRLO-G-3** Use the 2013 Parks, Recreation and Libraries (PRL) Needs Survey as an initial step to assist the development of a libraries master plan which will be completed in 2014; and an updated Parks and Recreation Master Plan (in 2015).
- PRLO-G-4** Provide easy and safe access to the city’s open space and trail network.
- PRLO-G-5** Ensure the city’s open space and trails network is well-maintained and continues to preserve sensitive habitats and environments.



Provision of park spaces that are accessible to all is important to the city. Located at approximately 105th Avenue between Wadsworth Boulevard and Reed Street, Sensory Park, above, provides a play structure accessible for both the physically and visually impaired.

POLICIES

- PRLO-P-1** As new development occurs, evaluate opportunities for development of new parks, facilities and programs to ensure that addition of new population in the city does not adversely impact the city’s existing quality and level of parks, recreation and libraries services.
- PRLO-P-2** Encourage design options that allow public gathering spaces for high-intensity development areas that are capable of supporting a variety of cultural and recreational activities.
- PRLO-P-3** Continue to identify and evaluate opportunities for property acquisitions that enhance access to the city’s trail corridors and public parks.
- PRLO-P-4** Ensure that all new residential development continues to contribute to the provision and maintenance of adequate parks, recreation facilities and open space to meet the needs of its new residents.
- PRLO-P-5** Develop a Westminster “brand” as it relates to the value of Parks, Recreation and Libraries in the community.
- PRLO-P-6** Conduct a community needs assessment for Parks, Recreation and Libraries to inventory what is already available and identify gaps to be addressed in future offerings by 2015.
- PRLO-P-7** Update the Parks, Recreation and Libraries Master Plan to reflect the city’s 2015 community needs assessment and planned emphasis on maintenance, operations and optimization of use.



Volunteers in the community help to maintain the city’s trail network.



Provision of sports courts and other active uses will be a focus of the city's needs assessment to ensure that residents have access to a wide range of activities and that parks spaces are maximized.

Parks and Recreation

- PRLO-P-8** Promote the development of park facilities that encourage pedestrian and bicycle access, provide a range of services and meet the needs of a variety of all ages and abilities.
- PRLO-P-9** Plan for new parks near downtown Westminster and Westminster Station that support redevelopment efforts and add to the image of the city.
- PRLO-P-10** Pursue updated master plans for City Park and Standley Lake Regional Park.
- PRLO-P-11** Pursue park landscaping and planting schemes that will reduce water consumption.

Community Facilities

- PRLO-P-12** Review infrastructure needs for recreation, and where appropriate, identify required improvements or new facility needs in the city's Capital Improvement Program.
- PRLO-P-13** Integrate mixed-use library facilities into high-intensity development areas, which should include library functions as well as cultural programs, event and meeting space. Evaluate the opportunity to locate such a facility within the downtown Westminster site.
- PRLO-P-14** Evaluate the possible alternative of locating library kiosks throughout the city to increase library access to all residents.

Open Space and Trails

- PRLO-P-15** Enhance and fund the city's open space properties to provide unfettered public access while preserving the environmental and wildlife integrity of the property.
- PRLO-G-6** Direct more resources to the management and operation of open space, reducing resources to acquisitions.
- PRLO-P-16** Utilize the 2014 Open Space Stewardship Plan for Operations and Maintenance.
- PRLO-P-17** Utilize the Trails Master Plan to develop connections between open space areas.
- PRLO-P-18** Work with proposed development projects to provide new linkages to existing trails and create new trails where feasible.
- PRLO-P-19** Work with the Adams County Open Space Program, the City and County of Broomfield Open Space and Trails Program, Jefferson County Open Space Program and Great Outdoors Colorado Trust Fund as partners in open space programs.



The city will continue to add to the city's open space network. One of the most recent purchases of open space property include a 9.9-acre area south of Big Dry Creek on the southeast corner of 112th Avenue and Sheridan Boulevard.