Executive Summary

Introduction

The City of Manhattan Parks and Recreation Department (MPRD) owns and maintains 28 parks comprised of approximately 600 acres. MPRD operates three outdoor aquatics centers, nine indoor facilities and offers over 27 miles of soft and paved trails. MPRD consist of seven divisions including Recreation, City Parks, Sunset Zoo, Flint Hills Discovery Center, Douglass Community Center, Animal Shelter/Control and Administration. MPRD provides a wide variety of recreational classes, activities, programs and services to the Manhattan community.

In contrast to outdoor parks and trails, indoor recreation and multipurpose community spaces provided by the City of Manhattan are extremely limited. With the exception of City Auditorium, Community House, and Douglass Community Center, indoor gymnasium and flexible community and recreation spaces provided by the City are almost non-existent in the community. Most communities of Manhattan’s size and with the population present have a significant community center in addition to the offerings provided by Kansas State University.

The only relationship evident between the City of Manhattan and Kansas State University is the use of the K-State Natatorium which houses three bodies of water; none of which are leisure oriented. USD 383 (public schools) currently relies on the K-State Natatorium facility for their swim programs, although the University does not have a competitive swimming or diving team. The University has a long-range plan to relocate indoor aquatics to be adjacent, and potentially incorporated into, their current Recreation Center facility. This relocated indoor aquatic facility would likely be leisure oriented with no lane pools to support competitive swimming programs. There are currently no other significant indoor aquatics facilities available and accessible to the public within the community. However, at the time of this Plan publication, a private service provider has expressed interest in developing a significant indoor fitness facility that could potentially include aquatic facilities.

The City of Manhattan has an existing mutually beneficial relationship with USD 383 and Riley County, as it relates to occupying and sharing outdoor park and indoor facility spaces. These relationships bring tremendous value to citizens from a comprehensive community services perspective and appear to be healthy at this time with no parties seeking changes. As it relates to indoor recreation programming, specifically gymnasium spaces, the City is very dependent upon USD 383. If the City access to USD 383 facilities went away, the City’s ability to provide indoor recreation programs would be extremely limited. Similarly, USD 383 programming relies heavily on the City providing access to a number of outdoor facilities within parks – including tennis, baseball, softball, and cross country. Based on national trends, the City will need to invest significant time and effort into maintaining the
relationship with USD 383 as the availability of those spaces for non-school programming appears to be dwindling due to increased demand from the community.

**Purpose**

The purpose of the Manhattan Parks and Recreation Strategic Facility Improvement Plan is to inform city leaders and staff engaged in decision making processes to determine how to best meet short-term (0-5 years), mid-term (5-15 years) and long-term (>15 years) athletic facilities needs of citizens through renovations to existing indoor and outdoor athletic facilities and potential development of new indoor athletic and/or recreation facilities.

**Process**

The process to complete the Plan began with a demographic review for the City of Manhattan and a market summary with recreation and leisure participation standards as produced by the National Sporting Goods and the National Endowment of the Arts. A level of service analysis was also completed to determine how well the existing City of Manhattan Park and Recreation system is meeting the needs of residents. This data informed the Plan through macro and micro level current and projected future population demographics, recreation and leisure participation rates and experienced or anticipated facility deficiencies.

The Plan process included a tour and assessment of parks and facilities of significance to the Plan to provide a baseline understanding of existing conditions, identify potential opportunities and challenges for future improvements, and establish an order of magnitude for future improvement considerations. This information established the foundation for development of improvement scenarios for the Plan.

The Plan process was firmly hinged on a robust and multifaceted citizen engagement effort to seek perspectives from individuals who frequently utilize Manhattan parks and recreation facilities and those who do not. While the focus of the Plan was to identify athletic facility deficiencies, needed improvements, expansions and/or new facilities, more diverse user group insight was sought than only input from regular users of these facilities. This diverse range of citizen engagement was a critical component of the Plan to ensure recommendations and outcomes align with priorities supported by the Manhattan community.
The citizen engagement approaches and tools utilized to seek input and receive comments throughout the Plan process included 187 different leagues, clubs, institutions, not-for-profits, community service entities, religious organizations, health and wellness providers, and arts and humanities being invited to participate in focus group sessions, public meetings, City Commission Meetings, Park Board Meetings, steering committee meetings, city staff interviews and a statistically valid community survey developed and administered specifically for the Plan.

Community Priorities

The priorities for future improvements to Manhattan parks and recreation facilities have been expressed by citizens through this Plan effort. While the focus of this Plan was to define improvements to enhance existing recreation and athletic facilities and determine the conceptual make up of potential new indoor and/or outdoor facilities supported by the community, participants were afforded the opportunity to provide input and perspectives related to a wide-range of elements regarding the Manhattan Parks and Recreation system. As such, the four highest priorities for improvements and/or development of new parks and facilities by the City of Manhattan appropriately acknowledge the priorities voiced by the community.

The following four highest prioritized recommendations voiced by the community through this Plan process are:

- Priority 1: Creation of indoor space geographically located to meet unmet needs in the community.
- Priority 2: Improvement to safety and playability of existing field playing surfaces.
- Priority 3: Improve availability and condition of community parks, trails, and neighborhood parks.
- Priority 4: Development of new indoor aquatic facilities.

Each of these priorities has a series of considerations that will need to be evaluated in greater detail prior to implementation. These considerations, more detailed descriptions of improvements, and anticipated costs are provided in Chapter 8: Implementation of this Plan report.

Of particular note, a topic of conversation throughout the Plan process was the concept of developing multiple smaller neighborhood recreation centers within the City versus a single larger community recreation center. This potential strategy of developing multiple small neighborhood recreation centers is a departure from industry trends. Most organizations are consolidating multiple recreation center operations into one larger community recreation facility to reduce operations and maintenance expenditures and potentially create a regional draw to the community. However, the specific unmet community needs, community-supported service delivery models, and level of service expectations of citizens were carefully evaluated.
through this plan process to arrive at the most appropriate delivery model for the City of Manhattan to be the multiple neighborhood recreation center service delivery model. For reference, this Plan identifies opportunities, challenges, alternatives, and future considerations for both service delivery models.

**Conclusion**
The improvement scenarios and timeframes provided in the Plan were developed by synthesizing relevant research and data, specific parks and facilities assessments and input and feedback received from focus groups, citizens, City Commissioners, Park Board Members, steering committee representatives and city staff. The implementation strategies provided in the Plan were developed based on community-supported priorities expressed through the citizen engagement effort and validated through the statistically valid community survey instrument.

The recommendations of the Plan are intended to serve as a guideline for city leaders to plan and budget for implementation of the identified parks and facilities improvements. The Plan should be considered a flexible tool that may need to be updated or modified as needed in the future. City leaders will need to allocate additional funds and potentially explore alternative funding sources to successfully implement the recommendations of the Plan.