

APPENDIX B SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM PUBLIC PROCESS

OVERVIEW

The following provides general summaries of findings from the public process.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS FROM FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS

The following summary statements define the key findings from focus group meetings held with various stakeholder groups primarily in July and August of 2007. In some cases, the summaries are complemented by additional meeting notes and filled out interview assessment forms that are on file at City Hall with the Public Services Director. Note that the findings represent the perspectives of those being interviewed and do not necessarily represent conclusions drawn by the Park Commission or City Council.

FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS SUMMARY STATEMENTS

Group	Key Findings
Skateboarders	<p>Skateboarders were represented by The Northfield Skateboard Coalition, a local group advocating the development of a high quality facility for skateboarding. The group provided a proposal and design concept for a new skate plaza that would serve their needs. In their opinion, the old skate park failed due to poor design, bad surface, and other quality issues. As per the proposal, a new facility would ideally be 12,000 to 15,000 s.f. and include access to bathrooms, drinking fountain, vending machines, benches, picnic tables, shady areas, and grassy areas for sitting. Nearby parking is also needed. A facility of this size would have a capacity of up to 200, although daily use would be less.</p> <p>A key positive aspect of the skate park is that it would serve an age group not always interested in other forms of outdoor recreation. The advocates also point out the importance of the social aspect of the activity, underscoring that location matters for facility success (i.e., ability to be seen).</p> <p>The group feels strongly that Old Memorial Park next to the new pool is the best location, with Ames and City Hall Parks distant seconds. Old Memorial Park is thought best suited due to location, visibility, and access to other amenities. It is also felt that the development could be buffered from adjoining neighborhoods and cause few impacts greater than that of the pool. The group is also willing to share costs through various fund raising activities.</p>
Seniors	<p>Overall, senior citizen advocates feel that the parks are not well designed to serve their needs, with the primary focus being on younger families and children. They see themselves as a growing population in need of outdoor recreation opportunities. Enhancements that would be of value include wider, smoother paths that better accommodate walkers. Narrow paths being used by bikers, inline skaters, and strollers are perceived as less safe, and higher bicyclist speeds are also of concern.</p> <p>In general, parks need to be more thoughtfully designed to better address senior needs. Providing shaded seating areas, looped trails with off-walk areas for wheelchair resting, wind and noise screenings, picnic tables with free-standing benches that are movable for small groups, and access to drinking water are examples of amenities that are needed. Benches should have backrests. Restrooms and trash containers are also important.</p> <p>In select locations, outdoor cooking areas with raised grills, food prep areas, good lighting, water, and shade are desirable to get seniors outside and socializing more with friends and family. Activities such as archery, horseshoes, shuffleboard, pickle ball, bird watching, and croquet are examples of desirable activities in these locations. (Pickle ball uses a tennis court to accommodate 4 smaller courts with lower nets.) Checker boards and chess tables, badminton, bocce ball, refreshment venders, and two-person swings were also defined as being desirable amenities. In select locations, tennis courts and miniature golf might have merit, as is the case with a portable movie screen, and more natural green space to look at and enjoy. All aspects of a park's design should be accessible. Parking lots should be accessibly designed and close to senior use areas.</p> <p>Riverside Park was thought to be an example of a park that could better serve seniors if well designed. The improvements to Bridge Square has increased use levels, has a better atmosphere, and makes the park more appealing to seniors.</p>
Friends of Hauberg Woods	<p>The committee is concerned about the future of the park space and preserving the rare, rich fen located here. The land was gifted to the city as parkland and they want to ensure that it is not sold for development, but kept as a minimally developed nature preserve with viewing and educational opportunities. They would ultimately like the city to help with maintenance of the existing trails and look into opportunities to acquire an easement or additional property around the fen, that is currently not park land, to protect the fen.</p>

FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS SUMMARY STATEMENTS (CONTINUED)

Group	Key Findings
Canines At Play	The existing pilot dog park located in Babcock Park has been successful and very well received by dog owners in the community. The CAP group works with the Jesse James committee members for use of this space during the Jesse James Days. Other users include non-dog owners, such as seniors from the nearby housing and families with small kids who like to come and watch the dogs. The users have been very respectful of the space, clean up after the dogs, and contribute money for ongoing maintenance and improvements. They would ultimately like to have one or two other locations that contain woods and/or water to allow for easier access to residents in the community and to reduce the pressure on the one site. They would also like to add seating, water fountains, lighting, and shade at the dog park(s).
Center for Sustainable Living / Community Gardener's Club	<p>The Center for Sustainable Living group is a fiscal umbrella for the community gardeners group who have plots located at Greenvale Elementary School. The group meets once a month and provides information on sustainable living, social structures, transportation, and encourages rain gardens, perma culture, etc. They are currently working on forming a green coalition and would like the city spaces to be more sustainable rather than having so much mowed turf, especially since proper maintenance of the parks seems to be an issue, and are very concerned with buffer or public spaces along the river and stream corridors and the city's regulation of development.</p> <p>The Community Gardener's Club works with the Center for Sustainable Living group to provide garden plots for the community at the Greenvale Elementary School site, which is currently 80' x 90'. Approximately thirty families participate at this site and space is limited. Each plot costs \$25 for a full plot and \$15 for a half plot, but there are grants available for those who can't afford it. Two of the garden plots are dedicated to the school for educational use and one plot is dedicated to a food shelf. They have a waiting list of people to use the gardens and would like to be able to provide garden plots at other sites so they would be more spread out for the community, but have been told by the City that they can't put gardens on public park land due to some type of law or regulation that makes it illegal. Water is the most important consideration for any potential future garden sites, along with location in relation to the people who would make most use of the site.</p>
Ice Now	This committee was formed by various skating groups and associations in the city to study the need for indoor ice rinks and to lobby for improvements to existing and/or new ice rinks for the City of Northfield. Based on their study, they feel a 2-rink indoor facility would serve the needs of the community and have already started conversations with interested groups on raising some funds for the proposed improvements.
Jesse James Committee	This committee is an all volunteer group that is in charge of the Jesse James Days event that draws in approximately 150,000 people over the 4-day event and is held the weekend after Labor Day weekend. The event is spread out over several park locations and people tend to walk from one location to another by sidewalks and trails. The main events take place on the Babcock Park rodeo grounds into Riverside Lions Park and up into the downtown area. They are satisfied with the space they have, though Ames Park has had a reduction in open space for their carnival and the rodeo grounds could use additional parking.
YMCA	The YMCA started up within the past year in the community with approximately 200 members and currently have office space and rent out gym space from the Armory and Greenvale Elementary School for mom and tot programs. They are conducting a community survey to find the needs and desires of the community to determine the type of facility they would like to build that would give the community the items they are lacking without competing with existing programs. Their goal is to build a facility within the next 2-5 years that would have the appropriate indoor space for gyms, fitness rooms, aquatics, etc. and would also like some outdoor field space that is lighted. They feel approximately 15 acres would provide the room necessary for a building, parking, fields, buffer space and room for expansion.
Northfield Youth Baseball Association	The association primarily uses the fields at Sechler Park, with additional space found at the Dundas field and the Northfield High School field. The NYBA schedules the large field at Sechler Park and has first priority. Practice space for the in-house programs are on any green park space available, which is only once a week, if at all. The spring programs are the most popular and they don't have any practice space. The 13/14 age group plays on fields that are undersized for them. Ultimately, they would like one more large ballfield at Sechler Park with related parking and misting towers like those found at the soccer complex.
Northfield Veterans	The group has developed a memorial at the Riverside Lions Park, dedicated to the Northfield area veterans. Their primary concern is the land surrounding the memorial and would like to work with the city on future planning efforts for improvements surrounding the memorial, as well as looking at possible future acquisitions to include into park space, as this park is a highly visible entrance feature to the City of Northfield.
The Key	The Key is a youth organization that provides Northfield city youth an alternative resource for recreation and spare time activities and is run by a youth board, with an adult advisory board. They own a building on Water Street next to a city owned building where they have their programs, but also use space at churches, Carleton College and the High School due to lack of adequate space, which causes some confusion for participants. Ultimately, they would like a building of their own that can handle their programming activities. An ideal location would be adjacent, or close to, park property where outdoor sports programs could be held.

FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS SUMMARY STATEMENTS (CONTINUED)

Group	Key Findings
NDDC	The Northfield Downtown Development Corporation is very concerned about keeping a “small town” identity to the downtown area and are very concerned about future developments not fitting in with this character. They feel that the city needs to have a specific plan and objectives in place that city staff should follow for future development, as the city staff turnover seems high. The river and adjacent spaces should be considered a high priority. More initiative needs to take place to incorporate the river into the downtown space by creating better “store fronts” and pedestrian riverwalk spaces along the back sides of the buildings along the river and designating them as park spaces with improved maintenance. They would like the riverwalk pedestrian areas to create a loop system with pedestrian bridges across the river and feel that the area from Carleton College to 7th Street is important to the downtown businesses. Greenway systems and trails are highly desirable for the community and should provide better connections to other trails and sites, such as Carleton College. They also feel that the farmers market location by the Riverside Lions Park should be considered a legitimate use and incorporated into the park system. The NDDC is also interested in having an RV park somewhere for visitors.
Northfield Garden Club	This 100+ member club work to beautify the city, provide information on gardens and plants, and eradicate invasive species. They donated the planters and hanging baskets downtown and the arbor/pergola structure at Riverside Lions Park to the City of Northfield, along with various ornamental and memorial gardens. Their main concern is lack of maintenance of the spaces in Northfield and feel that it is hurting the small town charm of Northfield, as well as wasting the taxpayers money, such as by not watering newly planted trees which end up being replaced repeatedly.
Northfield Hockey Association	There are approximately 260 skaters in this association. There is one indoor ice arena facility which they feel is not meeting the needs of the community and is in such poor condition that it is not worth investing any money for improvements to it. It is only operational from October to the end of February and the outside temperatures will affect the ice conditions. They currently buy 50% of their ice time in other communities, which still isn't enough time as they would like. There is one outdoor ice rink located at Babcock Park they use for practice space. They would like the city to flood this rink in the evening so the ice can get a hard freeze overnight, as well as move the hydrant, which is about 400 feet away from the rink. They feel a new 2-rink indoor facility would meet the needs of the community, but that it should have regulation sized rinks, adequate shower and locker facilities, and concessions area. This would allow for regular tournaments, which would bring money into the community. The indoor facility could also be used for other activities during hockey's off-season, such as practice space for soccer or lacrosse.
Northfield Knights	This adult Class B amateur baseball team uses the large field at Sechler Park three nights a week, April through mid-August. They have their needs met at this field but would like some improvements, such as permanent bathroom facilities, their own concessions, additional seating, and liquor sales.
Northfield Skating School	The school started in 2005 and over the period of one year, had a 450% increase in participants resulting in 165 students with 12 coaches. The school uses the ice arena for 3-1/2 hours on Sunday, which only allows for a large group session so they can't have private lessons, special groups or practice time. The rink is not qualified to hold competitions, so this factor, along with lack of year-round use, has resulted in seeing some participants going to other communities. They would prefer an Olympic sized rink, but can use NHL sized, for competitions.
Northfield Youth Soccer Association	The NYSA currently has over 1,400 participants in the house and traveling programs. Their traveling program is their biggest scheduling concern. They use two sites for games and practices which include the Spring Creek Soccer Complex (Tuesday nights) and the Sibley Soccer Fields. The NYSA handles the maintenance at the soccer complex and has the Knights of Columbus handle the concessions. They hold one tournament each year in June which attracts 65 teams. The school district pays a fee to use the complex to minimize their maintenance needs and also because football will get higher priority of school fields. Other users of the complex include one adult mens soccer team and the Hispanic League, which has 10 teams and also uses Sechler Park. Parking can become an issue at times and will overflow into the surrounding neighborhood streets. They would ultimately like to expand the property to the south for additional field space to reduce the pressure on the fields.
Northfield Swim Club	The swim club is volunteer based, but has paid coaches. They currently have between 50 - 60 members between the ages of 5 and 18. The swim club utilizes two facilities, the Middle School pool and the new outdoor pool. Their main concern is keeping costs down to their members so are very concerned with higher pool rates. They have helped fund improvements and equipment for the pools and even though they now pay a fee for lane use, they can get bumped by community education and Red Cross groups. They feel better communication and scheduling can reduce the propensity for conflicts.
Northfield Volleyball Club	This is a new club that has only been in operation for the past year. Major constraints to the clubs growth include qualified coaching and gym space. Currently they use school gym space which is expensive and they have to compete for gym time with school programs. They feel two additional gym courts available at reasonable times and days would be beneficial to them, along with better coordination of scheduling.

FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS SUMMARY STATEMENTS (CONTINUED)

Group	Key Findings
Community Education	<p>The City and Community Education (CE) have an established working relationship related to recreation programming for city residents. The City currently provides funding to help support a CE staff position. Examples of programs that are offered at City facilities include Little League Baseball, Youth Soccer Program, Ultimate Frisbee, SUPER Kids, Adaptive SUPER Kids, SkyHawks, Wiggle & Giggie, Introduce a Kid to Fishing, Water Babies, Starfish, Aqua Tots, Swim Lessons, Open Swim, Kickball League, Adult Softball League, Flag Football, Co-Rec Softball, Adult Football League, and Books and Stars. CE also provides a variety of programs through the School District and in cooperation with other organizations, which are generally available to city residents.</p> <p>Overall, CE anticipates that supply and demand for facilities will remain reasonably balanced. Even with some anticipated growth in programming, no major shortage of facilities is envisioned at this time. A few recommendations include making improvements at Sechler softball fields, where turf quality is a major concern by user groups, as is the lack of a good restroom and lighting. Unless lights are added, use levels are nearing capacity at this facility. Other thoughts on facility needs (based on input from users and CE staff observation) include sand volleyball courts in a central location, outdoor tennis courts on the north side, skate park, archery range, open space for pick-up games/frisbee, and a permanent and larger off-leash park. Additional neighborhood parks on the north side should also be considered to better service some of the more densely populated areas. Some trends to keep an eye on include lacrosse, kickball, and soccer, especially at the youth level.</p> <p>Overall, scheduling the use of City facilities has been easy through Barb in the Engineering Department. Over time, using a coordinated web-based system for facility scheduling, tracking registration, and determining participation levels is desirable. This approach would also allow for greater ease in keeping track of true supply and demand for facilities and overall facility utilization rates. Otherwise, CE staff envision continuing to build upon their current relationship with the City to serve the needs of residents.</p>
Mill Towns Trail Friend and Non-Motorized Task Force	<p>The Mill Towns Trail Friend group has been pursuing development of a 26 mile trail from Faribault to Cannon Falls since 1992. To date, 3 miles have been constructed (1995) to a minimum width and construction standard. In 2002, the City established some sections of the trail through town, mostly on local streets. State funding is being sought for development of the trail, including sections through Northfield. Acquisition of right-of-way is the most immediate concern. In 2008, a pedestrian bridge over the river and trailhead/transit hub will be developed. The bridge will effectively connect Sechler Park and Dundas to downtown Northfield. Finding an appropriate alignment for the trail through Northfield remains a major point of focus for the group, especially in the area of Carleton College on the north end of town. Finding the best route along the river to the south of downtown is also a major goal. The group is encouraged that this planning process will give these issues due consideration.</p> <p>The Non-Motorized Task Force focuses on improving pedestrian and bicycle facilities in Northfield to improve safety and encourage outdoor recreation, fitness, and alternative transportation. The group is very interested in the planning process as related to trails and on-road bike lanes/routes. Short term suggestions include installing bicycle parking at parks, creating trails at places where streets dead end, adopting appropriate standards for building trails, separating bicyclists and pedestrians from traffic in high use areas to improve safety, and creating a trails and bike route map for the city. Longer term suggestions include integrating trails with on-street bikeways in a continuous, signed system; developing high-value trails in proposed greenway corridors capable of handling bikers, walkers, and inline skaters.</p>
Tennis Club	<p>Organized about a year ago, the Tennis Club is a local advocacy group for promoting tennis and improving tennis facilities in Northfield. The group has been working independently and with local schools and colleges to promote tennis as an inter-generational sport and to enhance participation, especially at the youth level. One of the key concerns of the group is the lack of an indoor facility with six to eight courts. Providing a couple of additional outdoor courts in a city park is also a desire, although this is secondary relative to the need for an indoor facility. Recognizing that developing an indoor facility is costly, the group sees a partnership between the City and Carleton College, St. Olaf, or private party as the most reasonable approach. Building an indoor tennis facility as an add-on to a community center (if built) would also be a consideration.</p> <p>More immediate suggestions include adding wind screens at the Middle School courts and improving lighting at the Middle School and High School. The group would also be interested in web-based scheduling of facilities to make it easier to reserve time, versus showing up at a court and hoping it is open. Adding a couple of outdoor courts to Way Park should also be considered.</p>
Sportsman's Club	<p>The key goal of the Sportsman's Club is developing an archery range in Northfield, preferably in a city park. Space requirements is an area 150 yards long and 100 yards wide. The group would provide funding for developing the range, but would request that the city help with maintenance such as mowing and portable toilet. The group also highlighted the high interest in the sport and support for programming the facility by the School District/Community Education. The group also provided extensive information on design requirements for an archery range.</p>
Mayor's Youth Council	<p>As a year-old organization, the Youth Council is still developing its strategy for engaging youth in positive recreational, social, and learning activities. With respect to parks and recreation, suggestions include an increased emphasis on facilities that attract youth, such as movies in the park, skateboard park, socializing/gathering places (especially after 9:00 or 10:00 PM when youth have no where to hang out), volleyball courts, ultimate frisbee area, and an outdoor venue for concerts, plays, and arts.</p>
Friends of Way Park	<p>This committee was formed when the hospital was relocated and removed from the park site to ensure that the property was returned to park land, as was originally stated in the land donation by the Way family. The committee hired a designer to create a master plan for the park property and are willing to have fund raising efforts to help the city fund the proposed improvements.</p>