



Chapter 1

Executive Summary



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The Town of Munster Parks and Recreation Department (MPRD) staff and Planning Resources Team, working together with community leaders and the general public, worked collaboratively to develop the “Munster Matters” Parks and Recreation Master Plan (Plan). The Plan intends to convey a vision for parks and recreation within the Department. Additionally, the Plan will function as the Department’s long-term action plan, providing guidance to the department, establishing goals and recommendations, and identifying needs related to both existing and future park facilities.

Just like roadways and utilities, parks and recreation facilities include infrastructure that needs to be replaced overtime. Playgrounds, shelters, pavilions, and athletic fields are just some of the infrastructure that are aging in parks that need to be replaced. The Plan document identifies updated amenities that reflect parks and recreation trends that can be incorporated into parks when they are renovated. The Plan also identifies the recommended actions and steps for the MPRD to implement to satisfy the expectations of the community and its principal stakeholders. It includes recommendations for improving the delivery of programs and services, protecting open spaces, improving and potentially repurposing facilities and instituting continuous improvement processes. The Purpose of the Plan is to guide operational, recreation planning and development efforts, and philosophical decisions for the MPRD over the next 3-5 year period, through 2023.

The Plan is the result of an extensive community process including focus group and stakeholder meetings, meetings with elected and appointed officials, MySidewalk – an online engagement tool, and a community-wide mail survey. The goal of the Plan is to be a comprehensive park and recreation planning tool providing direction to the Department for improving the Town’s park system by identifying priorities, long-term physical development, expanding recreation programming and ensuring effective utilization of existing parks and facilities owned, leased, or maintained by the MPRD.

This Plan is a commitment to a course of action that leads to the development of a park and recreation system that reflects the vision of the people of the Town of Munster. As that vision grows and changes, the Plan can be adapted to match the new vision. The Plan contains text, maps, tables and charts that describe existing conditions, apply accepted performance criteria and recommend specific improvements to the existing system. Once adopted, the Plan will serve as the official document to be used by the Town of Munster to guide decisions regarding parks, recreation and the preservation of open space.

The Planning Resources’ Consultant Team (Team) was commissioned by the Park Board to prepare the 2018 Master Plan. Over the last eight to nine months, MPRD in conjunction with the Team worked cooperatively to study the needs of the Department and develop an implementation strategy. The Consultant Team is comprised of award winning professionals committed to developing a high quality road map for the MPRD to continue providing exceptional parks, facilities and recreational opportunities with a wide range of diversified programs and activities.

The outdoor recreation assessments were completed by Planning Resources Inc, recreational programming, operations, and workplace culture were completed by Executive Decisions Consulting, the visioning, focus and stakeholder meetings were facilitated by Upland Design, and the public opinion/interest survey was developed and tabulated by Readex Research.

In establishing the future direction for the Department, the Munster Matters Plan’s objective is to reinforce and establish initiatives and recommendations for implementation in support of the mission, vision and values identified in this document as well as maximize the quality of life through identifying the community’s needs, prioritized improvements to parks, recreation facilities, and open space, and effective allocation of the Department’s limited resources.

Planning Process Methodology

The planning process was guided by the MPRD Executive Director, key administrative staff, and elected Park Board members, as well as by a public input process – direct public input was gathered at a series of small and large in-person meetings and through a scientific survey effort. Throughout the planning process, Department representatives met with the Consultant Team to provide input. This collaborative effort fully utilized the expertise of the consultant team and incorporated local knowledge and institutional history.

Needs & Priorities Assessment Process

To gain an accurate understanding of the existing condition of the MPRD’s system and the needs of its users, the Consultant Team employed the following needs assessment techniques:

Anecdotal Techniques:

- Individual park site evaluations
- Demographics analysis
- Recreation programs analysis
- Operations workplace culture assessment

Qualitative Techniques:

- Stakeholder interviews
- Focus groups
- Community meetings and public forums

Quantitative Techniques:

- Community-Wide attitude and interest survey
- Community benchmarking
- Park Classification Level of Service (LOS) Analysis for park acreage, facilities, and access

Master Planning

The Munster Matters Plan is based on an inventory of current conditions as well as an analysis of community needs, including valuable direction provided by Town residents through a comprehensive, community-driven process, statistically-valid survey responses, and comments made in a series of focus groups,

public workshops and other forums. The Munster Matters Plan is presented in a sequence of chapters that identify trends in parks and recreation, a detailed look at the Department and the community that it serves, a description of the input garnered from the stakeholders, program and facility users, and interested residents received during the planning process, in-depth assessments of the parks and facilities, and recommendations for the future.

The following is an overview of the contents of the Munster Matters Plan document:

Chapter 2: Introduction

The Introduction Chapter of the Munster Matters Plan identifies the purposes of the Plan and provides a general background and history of the Town and the Park and Recreation Department and highlights several key events during the Town of Munster’s celebrated history.

Chapter 3: Community Profile and Demographics

In order to plan for the Department’s future, we must first understand the history, culture and traditions of the community as these are the underlying principles that help shape a community along with the people it serves. This chapter reviews the Town of Munster and the Parks and Recreation Department’s demographics and growth trends including annual growth rates.

This chapter also projects population figures to the year 2020 (5 years out) In addition to total population, the age and ethnicity of the Town of Munster is reviewed. This information provides an understanding of the community that allows the formulation of viable recommendations for park and recreation programs, amenities and services.

Chapter 4: Community-Wide Survey

A survey was designed to obtain statistically valid results from households throughout the MPRD. The Consultant Team, utilizing the services of Readex Research, conducted a Community-Wide Survey to provide the necessary decision making data. The survey was developed in conjunction with park staff and was administered from January 25, 2018 to February 26, 2018 by mail. The goal was to obtain 400 completed surveys via randomly selected sample of 2,000 residents. A total of 366 usable responses were returned. The effective response rate of 19% was calculated based on a net effective mailout of 1,928 (72 surveys were returned as undeliverable).

The results of the random sample of 2,000 households have a 95% level of confidence with a precision of at least +/- 5.0%. Preferences expressed in the statistically valid Community-Wide Survey provide insights about the demand for new programs and validation of the support for past accomplishments.

The results of the survey were used to develop a number of recommendations for improving recreation programming, and facility supply.

These and the other recommendations contained in the Plan will prove extremely useful to the Department to ensure that its park programming and facilities respond to the needs of its residents.

Chapter 5: Public Participation

This chapter details the engagement process and findings of the public participation element of the Town's Master Planning effort. This chapter summarizes the findings from the focus group meetings, stakeholder meetings, public meetings and provides a preliminary list of common land planning and programming ideas and themes that eventually became the objectives and initiatives included in the plan. The public meetings provided opportunity to test the common ideas and gather suggested action input from attendees.

Chapter 6: Visioning

Visioning brings together the inventory and public input. This chapter sets the course for the Munster Matters Plan recommendations, and is the outcome of the inventory and public process. Public engagement is critical to development of a plan that reflects community goals and builds consensus among stakeholders and residents. A robust community resident and stakeholder engagement process was initiated to seek input on what the future of parks, recreation, trails, open space, and the overall department should look like in Munster.

Chapter 6 summarizes the community involvement utilized in the planning process to include the integration of focus groups, staff and Board interviews. The findings of visioning meetings and interviews with MPRD staff and the Park Board provides an inside view of the Department. Feedback received from the community leaders, stakeholders and interested residents are summarized and their responses to activities, challenges and funding sources is documented in the Appendices to the Munster Matters Plan.

Chapter 7: Park Classification and Level of Service (LOS)

Chapter 7 assesses the park land level of service and establishes planning standards for parks and open space and a park land/open space classification system based on use. Classification standards are developed which include service areas, size of parks, acres per 1,000 population and population served for the different types of parks. Each park type serves a distinct geographical base that ranges from a few blocks surrounding a mini-park to several miles for parks that offer amenities that are unique to a region.

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) has developed a classification system that is used as a base to describe most types of parks.

The MPRD oversees 30 park sites with a total of 340.4 acres, this total includes the Centennial Golf Course which comprises of 95 acres. Based on the

2018 inventory, the MPRD Park Matrix reflects the current inventory of parks, their acreage, classification, and amenities. The MPRD currently is providing 14.7 acres/1,000 population, which exceeds the NRPA recommendation of 6.25-10.0 acres/1,000 population.

A detailed service area analysis of existing parks establishes the need for additional park space within the Community.

Chapter 8: Benchmarking

Comparing park departments and recreation agencies provide an understanding of how well an agency delivers programs, services, amenities and facilities for its residents compared with other agencies. The rationale behind this comparison is that a localized comparison provides a more accurate analysis of the needs and deficiencies of an agency. This chapter provides a comparison of the MPRD to other park and recreation departments in the region, providing quantitative comparison of many of the more common elements found within parks in this region. Conclusions are offered that look at this comparison with respect to public needs.

Chapter 9: Work Place Culture

By taking a holistic approach to culture, the Planning Team worked in conjunction with Department staff to identify how the MPRD could change to reach its maximum potential.

Chapter 10: Programming

This chapter looks at a variety of topics regarding the day to day functioning of the Department; focusing on a few specific areas where opportunities exist for improved services. Maintenance, training, collaboration, and administrative topics are discussed, with a series of recommendations presented for modifying, tracking, upgrading, or collaborating in ways to provide performance standards, check lists, and defined methods of operations which will allow staff efforts to focus appropriately. These recommendations are considered

suggested guidelines that can assist the Department in providing great services to the community. This chapter also includes a review of the core program offerings of the Department, including promotional efforts, financial review of program registrations, programming space requirements, and the relationship of the Community-Wide Survey results and demographics to future program offerings. The evaluation also includes a review of activity areas, age segment distribution of offerings, fees, gender, and season offered. According to feedback during the public input process, residents greatly appreciate the variety of program offerings. The most significant challenge for recreation programs relates to improving programs and program variety for youth and teens within the community.

Chapter 11: Park Inventory and Assessments

This chapter includes a thorough review of the parks within the system. Consulting team members reviewed all of the parks and facilities and provided assessments of general conditions of each site. The park assessment includes a 2013 aerial photo image of the park, a brief overall description of the site, discussions regarding the amenities and features of the park, a few photos of select elements and park features, and a summary of recommendations for park improvements. The recommendations incorporate feedback from the public meetings, stakeholder meetings, focus groups and staff discussions. Resident households from the Community-Wide Survey expressed high levels of satisfaction toward the condition of parks and facilities.

Chapter 12: Sustainability

Sustainability is defined as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainability consists of three elements: Environment, Social Structure and Economy. Collectively, these elements provide a foundation for quality of life which supports the vision and mission of the Parks and Recreation Department. The growth of the parks, open space,

and recreation system has identified the need to refine stewardship activities and establish Best Management Practices within the agency.

Chapter 12 serves as a guide for decision making for staff and Park Board so that the MPRD can provide services and maintain their facilities and operations more sustainably for the well-being of the community and the environment for present and future generations. The development and adoption a sustainability plan and the formation of a “Green Team” will ensure that sustainable practices are incorporated into all agency activities. Additionally, the development of an environmental policy focused on the core elements of purchasing, use of resources, energy, waste management, and planning and management will confirm the Department’s commitment to leadership and sound use of the Department’s resources in a responsible manner.

Chapter 13: Recommendations

Recommendations are the blueprint for action. Chapter 13 is a series of findings and recommendations regarding the Department’s parks and open space; open space standards; recreational facilities, park programs, and operations and maintenance.

The Munster Matters Plan recommendations are shaped by extensive public input, a needs assessment, and sound planning practices. These findings provide an overview of details identified within the Munster Matters Plan document.

Over the next 3 to 5 years, many influences will have an impact on the success of this plan. Funding availability, staff resources, and political and community support will play significant roles in the implementation process.

Chapter 14: Implementation Strategy, Appendix & Conclusion

The MPRD strives to be a best-practice agency. The Munster Matters Plan is a guide where Department staff needs to center their energy and values for the next 5

years. It is also a plan to inform the residents on where they will invest capital improvements in the future and how they plan to address key issues that were brought forward during the public input process. The Board and staff recognize how important it is to maintain a first-class parks and recreation system to keep people living and working within the Town’s boundaries and the economic impact the Department has on the community. The recommendations outlined in the Munster Matters Plan are aligned with the vision, mission, and core values of the community and the Department. These recommendations follow what the community voiced as a priority. Currently, the Park Board and ultimately the Town Council will need to allocate adequate funding to achieve these recommendations to ensure the successful implementation of the plan. Overall, the capital improvements can be utilized as a guideline for future improvements and development with flexibility to be altered and updated as circumstances and conditions change. Significant projects will require the development of detailed implementation plans. In the development of these plans, the Park Department may provide opportunities for residents to provide further comment on the project and influence its final form.

The goal of the Munster Matters Plan is not to overextend the Department financially or operationally. The MPRD will still require strong financial support from user fees and earned income opportunities as well as a commitment from the Board to support the basic infrastructure and staffing needs of the system. This will require a continued business planning approach and support from staff to operate in the most efficient and effective manner. The Department is willing and able to deliver on the recommendations in the plan. This will require everyone working together with the support of the Park Board and Town Council supporting the implementation of Minster Matters. The community desires and expects it so let the process begin!