



INFORMATION ITEM MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor and Members of Council

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Subject: Information Item: Boulder Parks and Recreation Master Plan Update - Scope and Approach

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following a delay due to COVID-19 response and recovery, staff is kicking off the 5-year update to the Boulder Parks and Recreation Master Plan (Master Plan Update). The purpose of this item is for Council to review the proposed focus, process and approach for the Master Plan update and to ensure staff are in alignment with city leadership in determining a successful process and focus. The project was scheduled to kick-off earlier this year but has been delayed until September.

Since the adoption of the current [2014 Master Plan](#), the department has focused on the identified key themes and priorities to improve facilities, programs and delivery of services to the community. The 2014 Master Plan and its development can be reviewed [here](#). Staff has also produced a [five-year progress report](#) and [highlight video](#) featuring the successes achieved since the adoption of the 2014 Master Plan.

A preliminary process and approach for the comprehensive update is outlined below. In the last five years, important community initiatives and priorities have emerged, and new trends have developed that will be addressed in the Master Plan Update. Similarly, based upon the success of the 2014 Master Plan, certain goals were accomplished, while others became business as usual and are now part of Boulder Parks and Recreation's (BPR) ongoing operations. Staff plan to focus on the new priorities, initiatives and trends in the community while continuing the work

still relevant within the 2014 Master Plan. The Master Plan Update will provide the department a strategic guide for continued improvements in the programs, facilities and services provided to the community.

An important component of the success of the Master Plan Update process is public engagement. Staff will build on the success of the 2014 Master Plan and lessons learned, as well as practices developed as a result of the organization's focus on improving public participation, to engage a robust cross-section of the community to shape the future of the department. The planned engagement will include a broad range of community members and specific community groups, including but not limited to; allied service providers, facility users and non-users, program attendees, youth and teens, older adults, people with disabilities, and non-English speakers.

FISCAL IMPACT

BPR originally budgeted \$280,000 for this planning effort. Due to the financial impact of COVID-19, BPR has negotiated a reduced scope and cost with the selected consultant team to address necessary budget reductions in both 2020 and 2021 that will still yield a valuable strategic document with robust staff and public engagement. The project is now budgeted at a direct cost of \$242,000, with staff providing some of the services removed from the consultant contract. This capacity is available due to capital project reductions (also a result of COVID-19).

COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENTS AND IMPACTS

- **Economic:** Sustainable and well cared for parks and recreation facilities create a quality of life that attracts and retains companies and their employees within the city. A strong park system can positively impact real estate values and municipal revenues. The Master Plan Update will ensure Boulder's system can continue to be a good financial investment for the community.
- **Environmental:** Urban parks and recreation facilities have an important role to play in how the city addresses the climate emergency, through the installation of sustainable and resilient infrastructure to the urban ecosystems that address other environmental issues such as carbon sequestration, urban heat islands and biodiversity. The Master Plan Update will clearly identify the role BPR has to play in addressing the climate emergency within Boulder as well as continued stewardship of green infrastructure.
- **Social:** Green spaces, time spent in nature, and recreation programs positively impact physical and mental well-being while also supporting health equity and the social ties that produce stronger, safer neighborhoods. The Master Plan Update will ensure that the work of the department over the next five years continues to achieve the mission and vision of the department, to promote the health and well-being of the entire Boulder community and creating a community where every member's health and well-being is grounded on unparalleled parks, facilities and programs. The process and approach laid out for this planning work is intended to engage a robust cross-section of the community to ensure diverse voices are heard and acknowledged with equity in service provision and access being forefront in the conversation.

BACKGROUND

In February 2014, City Council accepted the Boulder Parks and Recreation Master Plan. With acceptance of the 2014 Master Plan, BPR committed to a new mission and vision, as well as initiatives outlined associated with long-term goals and key themes. The goals of the master plan are outlined around key themes developed as a result of broad and deep community engagement, research and needs assessment elements of the planning process. These themes are Community Health and Wellness, Taking Care of What We Have, Financial Sustainability, Building Community and Relationships, Youth Engagement and Activity, and Organizational Readiness.

It is critical to begin this work so the discussions and outcomes can inform the department's short and long-term response to and recovery from COVID-19. Anticipated impacts regarding financial sustainability, core services and ability to provide continued access and equity across the system can be discussed as part of the engagement process. Outcomes from those discussion can be used to inform immediate decisions and support the final product. As with most planning efforts, this is envisioned to be an 18- to 24-month project, with a final product anticipated in early 2022. The Master Plan Update will outline key strategic alternatives under differing funding scenarios: fiscally constrained, action and vision. These strategic alternatives outline prioritized spending for the department's core services including parks, recreation facilities and recreation programs.



BPR develops an annual strategic action plan to ensure the Master Plan is a living document used to improve the overall system. Key accomplishments include:

- 92% of specific initiatives have been either completed or started
- Reduced backlog of repairs by 60%
- The number of youths from under-resourced families served by BPR's Youth Service Initiative (YSI) has increased by 400%
- Enrollment in EXPAND, programming for people with physical and mental disabilities has increased by 52%
- Other progress is outlined in the [annual report](#)

BPR is constantly evolving to enhance and improve the level of service to the ever-changing needs of the community. The Master Plan Update will identify new and evolving areas of focus and provide recommendations for strategic ways to address gaps in service within the existing framework of the 2014 Master Plan. The Master Plan Update will seek to incorporate strategic direction from city-wide initiatives such as the Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan and other department Master Plans, such as climate initiatives and equity, among others.

The BPR Master Plan fits into the hierarchy of plans cascading from the Community Sustainability and Resilience Framework. The Master Plan receives policy guidance from the Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan and derives other policy influences from city-wide strategies and initiatives, such as climate initiatives and racial equity work. The Master Plan then directly guides the department’s CIP and operating budgets., The Master Plan also influences the department’s decision making and day-to-day operations.



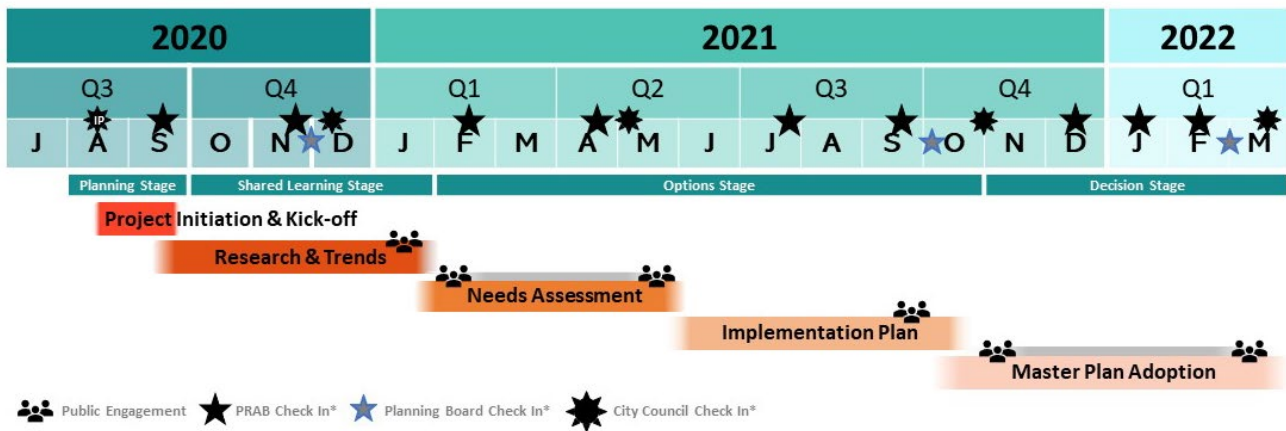
As a result of the 2014 Master Plan, a suite of new plans and studies were completed by the department. These include, but are not limited to, an [Aquatics Feasibility Study](#), which led to the improvements recently completed at Scott Carpenter Park and the North Boulder Recreation Center, an Athletics Field Study which influenced the concept plan for [Valmont City Park](#), a Design Standards Manual and Asset Management Plan that help the department manage park assets throughout their lifecycle. These and other plans are just one way the 2014 Master Plan has been translated to action for BPR. A goal of the Master Plan Update will be to incorporate information from these plans and studies into the future work of the department, along with recommendations from other aligned city plans such as the Transportation Master Plan and the East Boulder Subcommunity Plan.

A Request for Proposals (RFP) for the Master Plan Update was issued in early January and closed on February 14, 2020. The evaluation team reviewed the five proposals received and selected three consultant teams for interviews. Interviews were held at the end of February and a firm unanimously selected. Starting in March, a delay in the project occurred due to the response and recovery for COVID-19. Contract negotiations resulted in a reduced scope and project cost savings from the initial work contained within the RFP. The contract has not yet been finalized with the selected consultant team, but an announcement will be made as part of the public kick-off of the project.

ANALYSIS

Process and Approach

The Master Plan Update is intended to be an update to the 2014 Master Plan and not a complete replacement. The update provides the department the opportunity to re-engage the community on the key themes identified in 2013 to determine success to date and future direction for the department. The Master Plan Update is intended to refine the department’s focus and direction, address gaps and update policies, practices and trends. Examples of current issues that were not in the forefront during the 2014 Master Plan process include equity, climate, sustainability and resilience, affordability, and population change and growth to name a few.



*All check in timing is approximate

The Master Plan update is broken into five phases: Project Initiation and Kick-off, Research & Trends, Needs Assessment, Implementation Plan, and Master Plan Adoption.

The Project Initiation and Kick-off phase is comprised of the internal scoping for the project. This phase is well under way and a contract has been executed with Design Workshop as the project lead consultant. Remaining tasks within this phase include: hosting a strategic kick-off meeting and finalizing the project and public engagement plans. This phase will end with the public kick-off of the project, launching the project website and a presence on [Be Heard Boulder](#), the city’s public engagement site.

The Research & Trends phase of the project is intended to update the research developed as part of the 2014 Master Plan. The research topics include financial sustainability, asset management, trends, programs and services, and related plans. Additional white papers may be identified to help understand and prioritize other community concerns, including but not limited to climate change, sustainability and resilience, equity and affordability, and other industry trends. Functionally, this phase will end with a Systems Overview Snapshot that further identifies and clarifies the focus for the Master Plan update. This phase will end with sharing learnings with the community in the initial public engagement window and beginning the community conversation about future direction. More information about the proposed public engagement approach is below.

The Needs Assessment phase of the project includes analysis to identify community priorities to focus the department’s work and service delivery. This includes a statistically valid community survey, supply and demand analysis, benchmark study, Levels of Service analysis, Recreation Facilities Needs Assessment, and scenario planning. These pieces will assist the department in identifying strategies and initiatives to pursue over the next five to seven years. The end of this phase will be marked by the identification of priorities and confirming of those priorities with the community.

The Implementation Plan phase of the project is defined by the identification of specific initiatives geared to addressing the priorities previously identified. The identified goals, strategies and initiatives identified will be data-driven and include specific metrics. This will allow the department to collect the correct data to show progress and success over the next five years. The Implementation Plan will allow the department to appropriately align staff resources

and budget to advance community priorities and meet core service objectives. During this phase of the project, the draft Master Plan will be developed.

The final phase of the project is Master Plan Adoption. This phase includes all the formal steps required for the plan to be adopted by City Council and includes review and recommendation from the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB), review and recommendation from the Planning Board, and public hearing and adoption by City Council.

Public Engagement

Public engagement will occur during four windows throughout the Master Plan process. BPR is utilizing the framework of engagement windows used during the OSMP Master Plan process for several reasons. By defining windows of engagement, staff can be clear on the goals for engagement during that period and get specific input from the public to inform those goals. Windows also allow for an end point of the engagement, allowing the project team to gather the input collected, analyze the information, and allow decision-makers to make the most informed decisions. The level of engagement as defined within the city's [Engagement Strategic Framework](#) will vary by engagement window as indicated below.

Windows of engagement help clearly define what is being asked of the public and when, and there will also be on-going efforts to engage meaningfully with the public throughout the process. Some of the tools staff intend to utilize throughout the process include: a project website, inclusion on Be Heard Boulder, social media and news releases, and regular updates to PRAB, Planning Board and City Council.

The project team will work closely with the Communication and Engagement Department to ensure planned public engagement will meet the stated goals for each window, while also conforming to current public health directives and guidelines related to COVID-19. The public engagement plan will carefully balance the need for appropriate and robust engagement with health and safety of all community members. The project team is exploring creative ways to engage the public virtually while also ensuring a diverse cross-section of the community, including vulnerable populations and traditionally under-represented community members, participates in the process and discussions.

As part of the effort to identify project cost savings, staff will complete most of the public engagement tasks in-house, including, but not limited to, development of content for webpage and newsletter updates, facilitation of public engagement both virtually and in-person as allowed in the future, and a written summary of each engagement window. Staff will coordinate with the selected consultant team to ensure that the questions asked of the community are appropriate given the project phase and help further the master plan process overall.

The initial engagement window will occur at the end of the Research and Trends Phase. The focus for engagement within this window will be sharing the foundation of information that will serve the community and department in future phases of the project. The level of engagement during this window will be “inform”, as BPR will be providing the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives, opportunities and solutions that will be discussed in future phases of this process. There is no decision-making at this phase of the project. BPR has identified the end of this window of engagement as the first

formal opportunity to engage with Council on the current state of the department and more clearly defined areas of focus for the rest of the planning process.

The second engagement window will overlap the entire Needs Assessment Phase of the project. During this window, the public will be engaged at an “involve” level to ensure that their concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered. This will assist the department to identify priorities and policies that inform the future of the department. This phase will include multiple engagement tools and opportunities, including but not limited to a statistically valid community survey, targeted stakeholder workshops, youth engagement opportunities, and micro-engagements. Generally, micro-engagements are opportunities for staff to interact with visitors and community members in smaller group or one-on-one settings where those individuals are, rather than having them come to us. Toward the end of this engagement window, BPR will again engage with Council to review the needs and priorities identified throughout this phase and to confirm direction moving into implementation planning.

The third engagement window will occur during the Implementation Plan phase of the project. The level of engagement during this window will be “consult”, to receive feedback from the public on the analyses, alternatives and decisions being made. Specifically, the public will be asked to help confirm the strategies and initiatives selected as focus areas for the next five to seven years. There will also be an opportunity to review and provide feedback on the draft Master Plan Update. At this point, Council will be engaged to review the draft Master Plan Update to ensure its alignment with larger city-wide initiatives and priorities.

The fourth and final engagement window will occur throughout the formal Master Plan Adoption phase of the project. The level of engagement at this point in the process is “inform”, letting the public know and understand the Master Plan and its contents. This window consists of the formal public feedback received during public hearings for the adoption of the plan with PRAB, Planning Board and City Council.

Stakeholders

There are several specific stakeholder groups that the department will actively seek to engage to solicit their input and feedback for this Master Plan update. Those groups include PLAY Boulder Foundation and other community and program partners. General public engagement will include outreach to general community members, including non-users of BPR facilities, facility users and program attendees, with additional focus on reaching groups not typically engaged in public processes, including youth and teens, older adults, people with disabilities, those with low resources, and non-English speakers. Staff will work both cross-departmentally and utilizing existing relationships, such as through YSI partnerships and mentors, to reach these groups. Staff has been in contact with the Youth Opportunities Advisory Board (YOAB) and Growing Up Boulder (GUB) to determine methods and approaches to receive feedback from youth and teens. Discussions have begun with other departments on the potential to utilize multiple types of engagement ranging from the relationships of community connectors to digital resources such as Be Heard Boulder. Community Connectors are Boulder residents, natural relationship builders trusted within their own, oftentimes underrepresented, neighborhoods and communities, who partner with the city to create and support public engagement activities. Be Heard Boulder is the City of Boulder's online engagement platform with a wide variety of interactive tools to take polls, share stories, post ideas and ask questions. Staff intends to use a wide variety of tools and resources to meet our community members where they are at.

NEXT STEPS

The project team is finalizing the contract with the selected consultant team and the internal details of the project for a more formal public kick-off in early September. Work will then quickly progress into the Research and Trends phase of the project in the fall. A Council Study Session is tentatively scheduled for December 8, 2020 to discuss the status of the project, review the current state of the department, and ensure the project is on track to meet the needs of the city and the community.

For more information or to provide feedback on the proposed process and approach, please contact Regina Elsner, Parks and Recreation Planner and project manager at elsnerr@bouldercolorado.gov.