El Cerrito Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan

RECREATION PROGRAMS ASSESSMENT
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“A sense of community is built when the public has the opportunity to participate in our activities, attend our events, and visit our facilities”

“Parks and recreation improves the quality of life for all residents through programs and activities that encourage residents to be physically active and socially and mentally engaged”
INTRODUCTION

The Recreation Programs Assessment provides an overview of the Recreation Department and an assessment of recreation program offerings. The assessment includes: (1) discussion of program demand, (2) summary of the community’s priorities for recreation services, (3) evaluation of current programs and services, and (4) discussion of underserved or unmet needs.

The Recreation Department and the Public Works Department manage the planning, administration and maintenance of parks. Public Works is responsible for park maintenance and capital projects, and the Recreation Department is responsible for programming and custodial services. The two departments share responsibility for park planning and development.

RECREATION DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW

The Recreation Department is a full-service agency that provides programs, activities, facility rentals, sports reservations, and community events. In addition, the Department provides custodial services for all City facilities. In collaboration with the Public Works Department, the Recreation Department also provides, operates, and maintains a diverse, environmentally friendly, and financially sustainable array of recreational amenities, parks, and open spaces. Residents view this function as an essential community service per the City of El Cerrito National Citizen’s Survey 2016.

The Department plays a significant role in fulfilling the City’s mission and vision.

City Mission Statement
The City of El Cerrito serves, leads and supports our diverse and transit-rich community by providing exemplary and innovative services, public places and infrastructure, ensuring public safety, and creating an economically and environmentally sustainable future.

City Vision Statement
The City of El Cerrito is a safe, connected, transit-oriented and environmentally focused destination with welcoming neighborhoods, thriving businesses and vibrant public spaces, and diverse cultural, educational and recreational opportunities for people of all ages.

The Recreation Department aligns its budget and programs to support the six key goals adopted by the City Council in its Strategic Plan Goals 2015-2020 (Updated April 2015):

Goal A: Deliver exemplary government services
Goal B: Achieve long-term financial sustainability
Goal C: Deepen a sense of place and community identity
Goal D: Develop and rehabilitate public facilities as community focal points
Goal E: Ensure the public’s health and safety
Goal F: Foster environmental sustainability citywide

The General Fund FY2016-17 Adopted Budget reports the Recreation Department’s expenditures at $4.50 million and revenues of $3.55 million. The Public Works Department expends an additional $645,000 to support parks, fields, and clubhouses. The primary funding sources for the Department’s annual operating budget are the City General Fund and revenue generated from user fees and rentals. As with most California municipalities, General Fund dollars cannot keep pace with inflation, and citywide funding needs exceed the capacity of the General Fund. The City and the Department are committed to providing recreational services at affordable rates, which can limit the amount of revenue that can be generated. Of greater impact to revenue generation are facility deficiencies that limit the number, flexibility and types of programs and activities that can be offered or the number of persons served. The current physical condition of parks and facilities also limits the desirability of rentals and the rental fees that can be charged. The Department has identified opportunities to generate additional revenue through the renovation and upgrade of existing facilities and parks and explored revenue opportunities for potential additional facilities and amenities.
The Department is resourceful and judicious in its allocation of resources and leverages opportunities to expand recreation for the community. Examples include:

- Use of more than 200 community volunteers
- 20 Co-sponsored groups and teams
- 50 Non-profit organizations
- The application of technology to increase accessibility through online program registrations, reservations, and marketing. In 2016, 65% of the afterschool enrichment program registrations were completed online.
- Strategically hiring independent contractors to teach specialized enrichment activities and classes, supplementing the City’s Staff and allowing the City to offer unique classes that serve the broad community interests.
- Use agreements with other agencies for access to facilities. For example, the City of El Cerrito entered into a Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) with the cities of Berkeley, Albany, Emeryville, Richmond, and the East Bay Regional Parks District for the Gilman Sports Complex.

Despite these efforts, the available funding limits the ability of the Recreation and Public Works departments to provide the desired level of maintenance and standard of care for existing parks and facilities. Available funding limits the ability of the Recreation and Public Works departments to provide the desired level of maintenance and standard of care for existing parks and facilities. The effect of the limited funding over many years has resulted in a backlog of deferred maintenance projects and projects necessary to comply with the American’s with Disability Act (ADA). The Master Plan identifies nearly $6 million needed to fund deferred park maintenance ($5 million) and ADA compliance ($971,900). Additionally, the City’s recreation buildings require an estimated $3.8 million to address structural, mechanical, and architectural deficiencies and to comply with ADA requirements. The limited available funding has precluded the departments from funding a set-aside for the future replacement of park and recreation facilities and amenities at the end of useful service.

The public appreciates its parks and facilities and recognizes that funding has adversely impacted their condition. The City’s recreation resources are dated, most are extensively programmed, (in the case of fields, over programmed), show wear and tear due to deferred maintenance, and are unable to support the diverse programming needed to better serve the residents of El Cerrito. The condition of parks and facilities impacts the current operating costs through higher annual maintenance costs.

Residents of the City of El Cerrito are active participants in their community and use the programs and natural resources available to them. To serve this active community, the Recreation Department provides a wide variety of programs and activities (500 plus) each season (Fall, Winter-Spring, and Summer). To provide context, the NRPA 2017 Agency Performance Review reports that the typical park and recreation agency offers 175 programs per season. El Cerrito far exceeds this total. The limited inventory of facilities and the high number of program offerings illustrates the effectiveness of the Recreation Department and Public Works Department in maximizing the use of its resources.

In 2017, the Department processed 90,000 transactions, including 3,200 rentals, and distributed 144,000 marketing pieces: Activity Brochure (rECguide), E-Newsletter (rECnews), and 50+Newsletters by October 2016. Enrichment class enrollments as of October 2016 included 3,000 residents and 2,100 non-residents. New classes are constantly being offered as evidenced with new January class additions of Rikudim (Israeli Folk Dancing) and Gymnastics Gold.
The Recreation Programs Assessment reviewed current program offerings to identify the scope of programs offered. The assessment considered the public’s preferences and perceived deficiencies identified through the public outreach process. Public outreach has included:

- Public workshops
- Online survey
- Stakeholder interviews
- Citizen Advisory Group input

As an interface between the Department and the end user, City Staff bring an important and valued perspective. The Recreation Department Staff considers their greatest program successes to be summer camps, youth learn-to-swim programs, senior programming, and community events. Staff completed a questionnaire and a summary of the results is found in the Recreation Staff Questionnaire.

The community outreach process identified residents’ preferred programs and activities. These include aquatics, year-round field sports, and participation in community events. Top pursuits include social gathering (community spaces), organized sports (soccer, baseball, swimming, tennis), active and passive use of parks, and participation in enrichment classes and activities. There is a high-demand for youth activities, including youth enrichment, before- and after-school childcare and preschool, specialty camps, summer camps, and sports. High levels of use were reported for outdoor active spaces such as playgrounds, fields, the swim center, hiking/biking/walking trails, nature observation, and social gathering space.

The public is generally very satisfied with the quality and diversity of the programs and services offered. While very satisfied with the City’s system of parks, facilities, fields, and open spaces, the community has expressed its desire for improved conditions of the existing parks and facilities and upgraded routine and annual maintenance. At this time, citizens prioritize upgrading and maintaining existing facilities over developing new ones.

The community desires timely repair and renovation maintenance of public facilities so that they are attractive, dynamic and available for use. This priority reflects the community expressed need for places to recreate, exercise, and socialize.

Once maintenance standard is formed, for repair and renovation, and sustainable funding is established, the community will be able to address unmet demands and future needs in recreation.

The following summarizes the key findings from the assessment of the City’s program areas.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The Recreation Department programs, activities, and events are well received and broadly supported by the community. The depth and range of program offerings are responsive to community needs and reflect the community’s priority for youth programming. Staff is effective in scheduling the use of limited indoor and outdoor resources, developing partnerships to leverage facility access, and connecting citizens to programs that are offered by other service providers when they are not available or not offered by the City. Recreation agencies cannot provide every program or activity that is of interest to its citizens and must prioritize the allocation of finite resources.

The following are key findings of the Recreation Programs Assessment:

- Programs for youth are the top priority of the El Cerrito community. The Department offers extensive afterschool and camp programs, many of which consistently earn recognition. The demand for these programs continues to grow, and the Department has responded with additional camps, although enrollment and facility space quickly reach capacity.

- Aquatic programs and the El Cerrito Swim Center serve the community well, as evidenced by program participation and swim attendance. The Swim Center is currently used at capacity however demand for aquatic programs is expected to increase.
• Certain segments of the community are not adequately served. Accommodation for adult sports is limited due to the lack of program space and the need to prioritize offerings to accommodate youth. Teen programming is desired by the community however this demand cannot be met with the existing facilities. Demand for environmental programs to complement the City’s open spaces is also a community priority which will require additional resources to program. Finally, demand for services such as childcare and senior services, fitness and recreation will continue to grow and change.

• Active adult programming is limited due to insufficient facilities and/or lack of appropriate facilities to serve this demographic. The lack of a gymnasm and court spaces precludes offering adult court sports for organized team play or informal drop-in use.

• The demand for field use by organizations is extensive. The lack of fields with lights limits use after sunset. Additionally, adult sports organizations are not served, as there is limited or no field time available. The intense demand has resulted in insufficient rest periods to maintain fields in top play conditions. This high demand for field use and the limited number of fields also limits the opportunity for new sports to be offered.

• The intense demand for fields has resulted in insufficient rest periods to maintain fields in top play conditions, as increased traffic speeds turf decline. Wear on turf is determined by the intensity of use, soil moisture when played, and regrowth rate of the grass. Though there is no set standard for resting periods of natural turf (factors vary regarding hours of use per day, grass types, soil conditions, compaction and bare areas, maintenance standards, etc.), several common practices are applied:
  - Natural turf fields are “rested” during the winter/rainy season. Typically 90 days.
  - Natural turf fields are closed during rainy days.
  - Natural turf fields are rotated to maintain field conditions once every seven days.

o Standard practices:
  - “Good” field conditions remain with 200 hours or fewer play per year.
  - “Good” field conditions with some wear expected at 400 to 600 hours of play.
  - “Fair” field conditions expected at 800 to 1,000 hours of play.
  - Over 1,000 hours results in significant turf loss and damage.

Field availability by hours indicate that baseball can be scheduled 2,750 hours annually and soccer 1,375 hours annually (with average closure of 90 days for winter rest) on grass fields. This standard practice of field availability results in the overuse of natural turf fields. During these “available” schedule periods there are times that the fields are available and not played on, resulting in unscheduled rest periods which assists in maintaining the fields in fair playing condition.

• Serving the recreational needs of Baby Boomers (54-72 years) presents a significant challenge for the City. Boomers comprise one-quarter (25.3%) of the community’s population. This demographic needs facilities and programs that support active aging. The facilities and programs that serve the current generation of seniors do not meet the needs of Baby Boomers nor following generations interested in active aging.

• The support for a return-to-nature and environmental education reflects the community’s desire for quality programs that create positive experiences through activities that are more traditional and provide a respite from urban lifestyles. Other areas of growing interest include nature day camps, free play (unstructured playtimes) areas, and increased intergenerational programming. These may be opportunities for the Hillside Natural Area.
• The City is faced with high demand and insufficient space to meet the community’s existing recreation needs. The space that is available to the community for recreation programming requires extensive renovation and updates to meet current and future recreation programming. To fulfill its mission of providing the opportunities, resources, and services that will enhance quality of life and create community connections, the Recreation Department’s recreational, educational, and cultural offerings will require expansion.

The renovation, upgrade, and maintenance of existing facilities are integral to achieving the City’s objectives. Creating additional facility access through reliable and viable partnerships remains a high priority. With limited available financial resources, the challenge for the City is both short- and long-term and garnering public support for funding will require strategic planning and broad community support.

**PROGRAMS ASSESSMENT**

**ADULT PROGRAMS**

The City offers adult enrichment classes in visual arts, culinary arts, flower arrangement, pottery, and Taiko (Japanese drumming), in addition to a variety of dance and fitness classes including Zumba, Hatha Yoga, kickboxing, Aikido, boot camp, martial arts, and online courses. In Fall 2017 the most popular adult programs were Zumba and Beginning Polynesian Dance.

Active adult programming is limited due to insufficient facilities and/or lack of appropriate facilities to serve this demographic. The lack of a gymnasium and court spaces precludes offering adult court sports for organized team play or informal drop-in use. The deficiency in field space precludes adult sports programs. The City inventory of eighteen tennis courts is sufficient to support adult play. The Swim Center additionally provides lessons and water fitness programs targeting adults.

**AQUATICS**

The El Cerrito Swim Center supports an extensive array of aquatics programs. The Swim Center reopened after a 60-day closure to address ADA accessibility and upgrade mechanical and safety equipment. Prior to the closure, the aquatics program has reported annual growth since 2014. Youth swim lessons have experienced the largest growth. Swim team, swim camps, and training remained popular with more modest growth and adult lessons have decreased slightly. Pool rentals continue to be popular. Lap swim, master swim, and recreation swim participations continue to increase while aerobic/water fitness participations show decline.

The City provides pool time to West Contra Costa Unified School District (WCCUSD) to support School District aquatics programs. These include pool time for El Cerrito High School Swim Team training and meets, pool time for lifeguards and swim instructors for Korematsu Middle School physical education swim lessons, and pool time for low-cost swim lessons for Fairmont Elementary School.

The City fully utilizes the Swim Center to offer a wide variety of programs and informal recreational use. The community is well served by this program and desires more of what is currently offered.

**YOUTH PROGRAMS**

The City provides before-and-after school programming, enrichment classes, sports and summer camps for nearly 4,000 children and teens each year. The City of El Cerrito programs are highly regarded by users. The City received sixteen ‘Best of’ Awards for Contra Costa County from readers of Parents’ Press magazine, including six ‘Gold Medals’ for specialty camps and gymnastics classes. The City’s offerings continue to grow to meet the demand. The 2018 eEguide lists 220 youth activity offerings for the Winter-Spring season with the highest participation season, Summer, yet to come. In Fall 2017, the most popular youth programs were Karate, Beginning Gymnastics, and Intermediate Gymnastics.
The extensive number of youth programs and camp offerings align with the City’s commitment to the community’s youth. The variety, quality, and quantity of camp offerings require a separate, 32-page RecGuide, devoted to summer camps information and registration procedures. There are 60 unique day camp options ranging from Circus Arts, Crazy Chemistry, and Mad-Scientist to the traditional camps, swim camps, sports camps, and arts and cooking camps. The 2016 summer camp program reported 1,250 participants and 5,000 camp enrollments. The success of the program has resulted in more demand and in response the City launched its first Summer Camp Rec Expo in February 2017. The objective of the Expo is to showcase specialty camps, meet instructors and City Staff, facilitate communication with parents, and initiate early camp registration. Eighteen summer camps were introduced and 300 individual campers were registered resulting in 25% of the camps exceeding the minimum participant enrollment required to conduct the camp, on that one day.

PRESCHOOL AND SCHOOL AGED CHILD CARE PROGRAMS

The City owns and operates two preschool programs, the Casa Cerrito Preschool and Teeter Tots. Three additional licensed childcare programs supplement these; open TK- to 6th grade, located at Harding, Madera and Fairmont schools. Many residents are dependent upon before-and-after school programming and camps to meet childcare needs and the high number of registrations reflect the popularity of these programs. In September 2017 the Harding Afterschool Enrichment Program (HASEP) offered 16 classes with 206 enrollments and the Madera Afterschool Enrichment Program (MASEP) offered 19 classes with 213 enrollments. Popular classes include Lil’ Ninja Warrior, Coding for Kids, and Cooking Around the World.

School aged programs include organized recreational activities and enrichment programs conducted throughout the day and provided by licensed and trained Staff. The childcare programs provide a safe, challenging, and creative alternative to children being home alone.

TEEN PROGRAMS

Programs designed to target older teens are very limited within the El Cerrito Recreation Department’s offerings. The 2018 Winter-Spring season announces one summer camp for teen boys and one summer camp for teen girls and lacks a dedicated teen section within the guide. Classes open to teens and adults include Aikido, martial arts, Polynesian Dance, Kickboxing, and Mandarin. The City sponsors a Teen Leadership Training program and a Counselor-in-Training program for older teens seeking employment with the City as lifeguards and camp counselors. The 2017 NRPA Performance Standards reports that 58.9% of recreation agencies, with a population between 20,000 and 49,999, offer specific teen programs. Teens can be a difficult group to engage and achieving program success typically requires trial and error. Indoor courts, technology centers, and outdoor pursuits locations support programming that are trending with this age group, however, the City lacks the facilities to support these programs. Activities such as “tough-mudder” that incorporate personal and physical “best” or half marathons with run, bike, swim or fun stages are outdoor programs that could be supported. This may be another activity opportunity at the Hillside Natural Area.

SENIOR PROGRAMS

The focus of senior programming is to improve the quality of life for the City’s older adults. Programs and services are designed to promote social interaction, maintain health and wellness, improve nutrition, promote lifelong learning, connect seniors to support services, and provide fun.

Senior residents of El Cerrito and neighboring communities enjoy a range of programs that include fitness, wellness, arts, culture, computer classes, travel, and many other recreational activities. Services at the former Open House Senior Center included a daily lunch program, home delivered meals, Alzheimer’s Respite Program, health clinics, tax preparation, support groups, and health insurance counseling. A newsletter keeps seniors informed of programs, events, trips, and community updates. The quality and variety of programs serves the current users well.
The City’s Senior Center was relocated in July 2018. The relocation plan moved the program temporarily into two modular buildings, equivalent in square footage to the former center. The buildings are sited adjacent to the El Cerrito Public Safety Building and senior housing. El Cerrito Midtown Activity Center (ECMAC) is equivalent in size to the former center and the City is negotiating to lease an additional 2,000 square feet within the nearby Hana Garden Apartments. This additional program space is needed to provide a broader range of programming desired by the community.

**SPORT FIELDS**

Outdoor field sports have transitioned from seasonal offerings to year-round play resulting in a greater demand for fields that are designed for seasonal play. The City provides rentals of athletic fields to support community organizations and balances those needs with preserving neighborhood quality of life and protecting park resources. Fields are extensively used by youth sport organizations to serve the demand. Insufficient land is designated for athletic field sports to support the demand for soccer, school physical education, and provide the necessary rest periods for turf maintenance.

The demand for field use by organizations is extensive. The lack of fields with lights limits the use of fields after school and for adult sports. Adult sport organizations are not served, as there is limited or no field time available. The competition by various sports teams for access to fields provides little opportunity for new sports to be offered. The addition of new sports is adversely limited by the lack of availability and type of fields to support the sport. The need for soccer fields continues to grow and illustrates the influence of the changing demographics on programming and facilities.

**ENVIRONMENTAL AND NATURAL RESOURCES**

The support for a return-to-nature and environmental education reflects the community’s desire for quality programs that create positive experiences through activities that are more traditional and provide a respite from urban lifestyles.

The *Urban Greening Plan* has defined goals regarding environmental priorities. These goals are: (1) Environmental Sustainability, (2) Environmental Stewardship, (3) Community Identity, (4) Active Living/Transportation, (5) Economic Vitality, and (6) Urban Livability. These goals support the community’s desire to support the City’s natural resources and invest in a sustainable future.

Other areas of growing interest include nature day camps, free play (unstructured playtimes) areas, and increased intergenerational programming. Nature study education programs, nature and science camps, pre-school field trips to open space, family nature programs, and school field trips for historical and cultural interpretative studies could be expanded. For example, an objective from the Urban Greening Plan is to ensure residents have access to a range of parks and open spaces, including community gardens, tot lots, gathering spaces, and natural landscapes.

A robust community garden program is an opportunity for meaningful community engagement and can provide a number of benefits to El Cerrito. Community gardens and demonstration gardens teach urban agriculture. Edible gardens promote healthy food choices and reveal an appreciation of farming and gardening in the Bay Area’s unique ecosystem. In a City that is densely populated, the use of small open plots of land that can be green with edibles or beautification provides respite from urban areas. The City has ventured into community garden programming and is encouraged to continue its support and partnership with volunteer community groups sharing this interest.
SPECIAL EVENTS

Community engagement is one of the Strategic Plan Goals for the City. The Recreation Department coordinates and manages many of the City’s special events. These very popular community-wide events bring neighbors together, deepen a sense of place and build community. There are 10 events produced annually by the Department that include the July 4th Festival, Halloween Haunted House, Pancake Breakfast and Toy Drive, Volunteer Recognition Dinner, Family Sweetheart Dance, Crab Feed, and the Spring Egg Hunt. An estimated 16,000 residents attended these events in 2016. Park related events coordinated by the Public Works Department and volunteers include Earth Day, El Cerrito Hillside Festival, environmental workshops, and Arts & Culture Day.

RENTALS

Facility rentals are an important and a valued service for the El Cerrito community. Recreation Department Staff efficiently and effectively process reservations and rental requests. Staff must balance the demand for rental space with the City’s need for program space. The Community Center provides a prime example. As the largest public gathering space in the City, the Community Center is in high demand for rental while it also serves as the site for the majority of the City’s indoor recreation programs. The current condition of some of the parks, barbeque and picnic areas, and clubhouse buildings limits the demand for rentals. Creating rental opportunities such as half-day rates, primetime and non-primetime rates, and increased maintenance may result in greater demand.

The City has an opportunity to enhance services to the community and increase its revenue through rentals. Implementation requires capital investment to upgrade existing facilities or new development. The Dorothy Rosenberg Memorial Park property, with views to San Francisco Bay and natural setting, could become an event destination. With the Bay as a backdrop, the site is ideal for intimate gatherings. Other options could include a mediation/art/natural environment retreat or center, or a combination of these uses. However, limited parking and the lack of public transportation adversely impact these uses.

CREATE COMMUNITY

The California Park and Recreation Society launched their California Action Plan (CAP) in 2018, with the mission being “We create community through people, parks, and programs”. The CAP builds upon the original Vision, Insight and Planning (VIP) document and five key strategies have emerged: Advocate – Communicate – Evaluate – Innovate - Collaborate. These strategies are to assist the profession with keeping pace with changing techniques, tools and technologies to address the following identified trends over the next ten years:

- Health and Wellness
- Revenue Generation and Cost Recovery
- Changing Technology
- Demographic and Cultural Diversity
- Social Media
- Social Equity
- Asset Reinvestment
- Partnerships and Collaboration
- Water Conservation
- Aging Populations
- Environmental Sustainability

The Recreation Department addresses many of these major trends through their programs, facilities, events, and activities that positively affect the lives of residents and work towards developing a strong community. For instance, promoting health and wellness through play, activity, sports, and trails results in a healthier community, appreciation of resources, and social connections.

The Recreation Department compliments the public’s choices and provides classes and activities not found in the private sector. The
Department serves as a recreation resource, referring residents to nearby communities and local providers when specific programs or activities are not available, or not offered by the City. Staff has expressed the desire to enhance this service to become “the recreation resource center” for the community. A plan and funding are required to proceed.

The assessment of the capacity of the market to serve the demand for recreation must consider services available to the community from non-City recreation service providers. See Non-City Service Providers.
RECREATION STAFF QUESTIONNAIRE
Prior to initiating the City’s Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan study, Department Staff completed a questionnaire regarding programming, resources, opportunities, and challenges. Responses were received from Staff representing all areas of recreation services, parks, and environmental services. Staff responses and Staff suggestions are summarized below.

**HOW DO PARKS AND RECREATION SERVICES CONTRIBUTE TO THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN EL CERRITO?**

Building community, enhancing quality of life, providing enriching experiences, and environmental stewardship are considered primary benefits across all program areas. Providing quality parks, programs and indoor space to conduct programs are considered a primary community need.

Themes emerged regarding Staff’s opinions of the successes, challenges, and vision for the department. For Staff, recreation and parks contribute to the quality of life through building community and community cohesion, providing enriching experiences, supporting public health, promoting environmental stewardship, and creating both active and passive recreation opportunities. “A sense of community is built when the public has the opportunity to participate in our activities, attend our events, and visit our facilities” was a response reflected throughout the questionnaires. Parks and recreation improves the quality of life for all residents through programs and activities that encourage residents to be physically active and socially and mentally engaged. Other significant contributions include:

- Connecting residents to the environment and enjoyment of the natural beauty in which they live. Preserving open spaces to provide habitat and habitat connectors for flora and fauna.
- Providing residents both indoor and outdoor spaces for large family and social gatherings.
- Producing large community events that build memories, contribute to community connection, and cultivate civic pride.
- Adding value to neighborhoods by incorporating parks within easy walking distance from residents.
- Offering a wide variety of specialty classes allows participants to try new things, sharpen/develop new skills, engage in social and physical activities, and more. These opportunities contribute to emotional and physical wellbeing.

**WHAT IS YOUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF PARKS AND RECREATION IN EL CERRITO?**

Staff envisions a future with an inventory of updated and well-maintained facilities and parks with coordinated programming and activities. Parks and facilities renovated to current standards and fully accessible, encouraging use by persons of all abilities.

- Provide, operate and maintain diverse, environmentally friendly, and financially sustainable recreational amenities, parks, and open spaces.
- Create a recreation campus serving all ages.
- Establish the Recreation Department as the definitive resource for connecting residents with recreation services. Work collaboratively with public agencies, non-profit organizations, and commercial service providers to: (1) address community recreation needs, and (2) identify the programs and services available from all local providers, and (3) create opportunities for program partnerships.

**WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE ARE THE COMMUNITY’S TOP FIVE RECREATIONAL PURSUITS (FAVORITE ACTIVITY OR PLACES TO GO)?**

El Cerrito residents are active participants in their community and fully utilize the program opportunities and natural resources available to them. Top pursuits include: social gathering (community spaces); organized sports (soccer, baseball, swimming, tennis); active and passive use of parks; and participating in enrichment activities. Staff reports that all outdoor active spaces such as playgrounds, fields, swim center, hiking/biking/walking, nature observation, and social gathering spaces have high levels of use.
WHAT PROGRAM AREA(S) IS/ARE OF HIGHEST DEMAND AND INTEREST?

El Cerrito community members like to swim, play field sports all year, and join in community events. High-demand youth activities include youth enrichment programming inclusive of before and afterschool childcare and preschool, specialty camps, specialty summer camps, and gymnastics. The Senior Center is active year round with programs, events and trips. Facility rentals are in high demand with Arlington Picnic area and Clubhouse rentals as community favorites.

It is the opinion of Staff that the demand in these areas will continue to grow. Programs are filling with fewer cancellations and maximum enrollments are achieved in camps and gymnastics regularly.

Staff generally believes that residents wish to stay healthy and live longer. The result is a demand for more and innovative forms of physical activities opportunities. Staff indicates that the large aging population and a wave of young families will maintain the need for services. Considering households where parents are caretakers of young children and their aging parents will create an increased demand of multi-serving activities in a single location.

WHAT, IF ANYTHING, LIMITS YOUR ABILITY TO DELIVER THE LEVEL OR QUALITY OF SERVICES, PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES YOU BELieve THE COMMUNITY DESIRES?

Staff response was consistent that the challenge continues to be the condition and on-going maintenance of the facilities, and the lack of program space. There is agreement among Staff that a budget that provides sustainable funding for building and park maintenance, repairs, upgrades, and replacement is vital to the future of these city assets. Staff also reported:

- Insufficient land is designated for athletic field sports to support the demand for soccer, school physical education, and providing the necessary rest periods for the maintenance of the turf.
- The amount of physical space. Facilities provide inadequate space limiting both the number of programs that are offered and the number of people that may participate.
- Increased storage to accommodate growing number of successful programs
- More classrooms, computer labs and technology program rooms
- Gymnasium spaces for gymnastics and sports
- Field spaces for adult sports
- Sprung wooden floors for Zumba and dance classes
- Commercial kitchen and larger social hall
- New Community Center and Senior Center
- Casa Cerrito should be demolished and replaced with a new building to house the pre-school programs and storage units
- Parks improvements include:
  - Improved lighting
  - Replace outdated playground equipment and surfaces with bright, fun, cheerful and ADA compliant features
  - Restroom at Central Park
  - Contemporary signage
  - Shade structures, picnic equipment and trash receptacles
  - New shrubs, flowers, natural flora and fauna areas
- Departmental improvements include:
  - Review Staffing and levels of service. Determine if adjustments need to be made to:
    - Incorporate a Building Attendant classification
    - Increase custodians
  - Re-evaluate and update Facility Rental Policies and Procedures
WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER YOUR PROGRAM SUCCESSES?

- Youth learn-to-swim programs, senior programming, and special/community events are considered the greatest success.
- Identifying and hiring quality independent contractors to provide specialized enrichment activities have supported the Department’s ability to offer a variety in subject matter and ages served.
- Preschool envisions a holistic success. Called “the hidden gem of El Cerrito”, the preschool program has seen students from their program return to work for the department. Environmental education is incorporated into the preschool program and in turn, students have taught their families to Reduce/Reuse/Recycle/Compost.

DO FEES IMPACT PARTICIPATION?

Staff believes that fees present a barrier to participation for some lower income residents. The Department has a nominal scholarship program ($150 per year). The Department subsidizes Senior Center programs (low cost or free classes) and the Swim Center (outdoor pool open year round does not achieve total cost recovery). Even “reasonable” prices as compared to the market, for example $8.00 per hour for childcare, are cost prohibitive for many working families in El Cerrito.

An issue for the Department is fee setting in a community with income disparity. Staff suggests a comparative analysis of rental fees in the El Cerrito market area. The analysis must consider the physical condition, aesthetics, and amenities of the facilities.

HOW DO YOU MEASURE SUCCESS?

Success is measured by attendance, comments, referrals, and inquiries of interest in the class being repeated. Given the fiscal constraints and existing resources, Staff considers parks kept open, safe, and playable as a success. New programs are introduced based on space availability, previous requests, survey data in some instances, number of participations, and input from class and program attendees. In order to launch a new program/class/activity, they consider:

- Need/Demand. Number of requests that come in (is this something many are asking for?)
- Is the requested program in line with our Department’s goals and mission?
- Is it something we can actually accommodate in terms of space/scheduling?
- Do we have someone to lead the requested program (i.e. Staff or contractors)?
- Value: is the fee reasonable and what will the customer walk away from this (experience/take-home items)

THE CITY IS CONSIDERING FUTURE PARKS, RECREATION FACILITIES, AND PROGRAMS. WHAT IMPROVEMENTS OR ADDITIONS DO YOU BELIEVE ARE MOST IMPORTANT TO SERVE THE COMMUNITY?

A new Senior Center was paramount due to the recent termination of the building lease. Other priority needs include: artificial turf field(s) to alleviate some field space demand; gymnasium, gymnastics space, clubhouse renovations and flex spaces; renovation of the community center with increased storage, functionality and technology.

Maintenance and sustainable funding continue to be prime concerns. Specific areas include a sustainable funding for the Swim Center maintenance after the bond measure sunsets; upgrade and repair existing facilities; re-purpose the Arlington Clubhouse; keep the Greenway maintained at a higher standard; and enhance Ohlone Greenway. Incorporating permanent and well-maintained restrooms at all parks that self-lock during curfew hours is an item of consideration.
LIST AGENCIES, BUSINESSES, NON-PROFITS, OR OTHER ORGANIZATIONS YOU CONSIDER AS PROGRAM PARTNERS AND/OR SIMILAR SERVICE PROVIDERS IN YOUR MARKET AREA?

El Cerrito does have similar service providers offering a choice in recreational pursuits. Adult Education, Contra Costa College, and West Contra Costa Unified School District offer senior center programs; senior housing developments offer their internal recreation programs; preschools and afterschool programs in the area; and 24 Hour Fitness with a pool is moving to El Cerrito.
NON-CITY SERVICE PROVIDERS
NON-CITY SERVICE PROVIDERS

The assessment of the capacity of the market to serve the demand for recreation must consider services available to the community from non-City recreation service providers. Public, private, commercial and non-profit service organizations in El Cerrito and neighboring communities provide recreation opportunities and choices to El Cerrito residents. Different types of providers appeal to different segments of the recreation market and offer a different experience for the same activity - a private swim club offers a different experience and appeals to a different market segment than a community pool. The two types of offerings complement each other, provide the public with choices best suited to their needs and preferences, and both help meet the demand for aquatics.

Non-City service providers in El Cerrito primarily provide fitness and specialty studios (martial arts, Yoga, dance), and daycare.

The City of El Cerrito actively seeks program partners and collaborators to provide access to facilities and/or provide programming support. These include:

PROGRAM COLLABORATORS

- El Cerrito Art in Public Places program
- Contra Costa Civic Theater
- Cerrito Theater
- El Cerrito Art Association
- El Cerrito Historical Society

ADDITIONAL PROVIDERS

The following is an inventory of service providers that supplement the City’s program offerings or offer specialized services not offered by the City of El Cerrito.

PUBLIC AND NOT-FOR-PROFIT SERVICE PROVIDERS

- Cities of Albany, Berkeley, Emeryville, Richmond, San Pablo, Pinole, Hercules, etc.
- Albany and Berkeley Y’s (formerly the YMCA)
- Jewish Community Center of the East Bay (JCC)
- Private Camps and Enrichment Program Educators (Lawrence Hall of Science, Galileo, Richmond Art Center, Steve & Kate’s)
- El Cerrito Preschool Cooperative (ECPC)
- Head Over Heals
- Golden Bear Gymnastics

SPECIALTY STUDIOS

Commercial studios offer a wide range of specialty programs and services. Listings of providers are a snapshot in time as there is a high rate of turnover in specialty studios.

- Square One Yoga
- El Cerrito Yoga Bikram
- Ojas Yoga Center
• El Cerrito Fitness – Pilates Studio
• Bridges Rock Gym – Rock Climbing Gym
• Fitwise Pilates Studio
• Cutz Fitness – Gym
• Curves Health Club
• Pilates at the Plaza – studio
• XFit Training
• 24-Hour Fitness with a pool is re-locating to El Cerrito.
• Katie’s Dance Studio & Co
• El Cerrito Ballet Center
• Cerrito Dance Arts Center
• Ah-Lan Dance
• Zumba classes with Catherine Martikan – cardio and fitness
• El Cerrito Martial Arts
• East Bay Judo Institute
• Karatedo Shinyokai martial arts school
• Mind Body Dojo
• MTEAM Fencing East Bay
• Wen Wu School of Martial Arts – Chinese martial arts

CHILD CARE

• According ChildCareCenter.us, El Cerrito has 14 licensed daycare centers. Care options include: childcare, daycare, infant care, educational childcare, KinderCare, preschools, and child development centers.

PRIVATE CLUB

• Berkeley Country Club - membership country club with 18-hole golf course, clubhouse, fitness center, and café.
El Cerrito Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan

RECREATION PROGRAMS ASSESSMENT