4.1 Demand
4.2 Supply
4.3 Addressing the Gap

The needs assessment for the Master Plan is completed through a gap analysis— a comparison of the City’s supply to the demand with descriptions of the deficiencies. Assessing the level of demand, compared to the City’s supply of recreation services, identifies gaps in service and opportunities to satisfy community needs. This analysis is developed through an assessment of the City’s community profile, current trends in recreation management, a review of the City’s supply of recreation amenities, and the community’s input and expectations.

4.1 DEMAND

An understanding of the City’s demand for recreation service is informed by an evaluation of collected community input, as well as trends in recreation that may create demand for new City park services.

RECREATIONAL TRENDS

State and national social, demographic, and environmental trends impact the demand and delivery of recreation services. The analysis of trends is one of several forecasting tools used to project interest in and the potential use of amenities and services for recreation, leisure, and outdoor activities. Understanding recreational trends also provides planning information to anticipate the recreation desires and needs of El Cerrito’s community. Recreation trends identified include community design and inclusion, environmental sustainability, health and wellness, and unstructured programming.

COMMUNITY DESIGN AND SOCIAL RECREATION

Addressing issues of social isolation and physical inactivity through community design is an emerging trend in regional and national recreation planning. As inactivity and social isolation increase, so do the incidence of obesity, heart disease, diabetes, depression, and mental illness. Recreation providers are increasingly supporting parks as vibrant social meeting places where public space promotes familiarity and social bonds, making communities and neighborhoods safer and healthier.

In promoting social recreation, an important factor is the design and provision of environments for a range of age groups, physical abilities, and cultural interests. Beyond making facilities and parks social gathering places, promoting inclusiveness in design is a growing priority of recreation providers. An application of broadened inclusivity in community design is seen in park play structure design. Parks and play equipment can be designed to allow use by community members with physical restrictions and special needs, as well as older adults. Playgrounds can feature equipment that is accessible, fun, and easy to use by those who require mobility assistance. Using firmer material alternatives to sand and wood chips and the utilization of ramps supports this. Outdoor fitness equipment, designed for adults and seniors of all ability levels, additionally combats obesity and inactivity. Park design can also combine active and passive uses and provide for a variety of leisure activities within close proximity of each other for a mix of recreation uses and users. Inclusive design enables park and recreation facilities to operate at fuller capacity and meet a variety of community demands.

Figure 11. 4th of July Celebration
**Environmental Sustainability**

El Cerrito is a leader in environmental sustainability and has embraced planning strategies that improve the City’s natural spaces and places. As a national and international trend, environmental sustainability reflects a growing awareness of environmental health, and further supports opportunities for healthier parks and sustainable facilities. Supporting environmental sustainability, green building components and systems can be incorporated into the City’s facilities and parks while also creating operational cost savings. These opportunities include preserving and reclaiming open space, conserving energy, water, and resource use, using environmentally friendly materials, and implementing energy-efficient and green building measures.

To support sustainable components in the City’s recreational planning, green initiatives can be implemented to promote sustainable practices and awareness, such as educational programs on environmental topics, recycling and energy saving campaigns within facilities, creating community gardens, and continued support of non-vehicular transportation through active transportation measures and implemented projects. The City of El Cerrito has already established goals in these areas and continues to incorporate environmental sustainability in its planning and project development efforts.

**Health and Wellness**

Disease prevention, improved health, and active aging are primary motivators for recreation and exercise. Public park and recreation agencies are the leaders in providing these services. Programming that promotes fitness and a healthy lifestyle benefits the health and wellness of a community, and should be available for all ages, fitness levels, and abilities. Additionally, the availability of programs that engage citizens in physical activity has a direct correlation to the amount of physical activity individuals will perform. Physical barriers, safety concerns, and distance to parks and facilities can prevent residents from using facilities and programs. El Cerrito’s availability of park and recreation services plays an important role in increasing the physical activity of its community, and equitable access to these facilities is a priority.

**Unstructured Outdoor Recreation**

Increased interest in unstructured outdoor play and the provision of unstructured recreational space is a significant trend informing park and recreation planning. Supporting a variety of passive recreation activities, such as walking, social gathering, and nature viewing, is a
valuable component of El Cerrito’s park system. For instance, the Ohlone Greenway provides an active corridor through which El Cerrito’s open spaces are linked, while also encouraging pedestrian-oriented mobility. Supporting passive recreation in natural, open space is another example of the City’s commitment to unstructured outdoor recreation.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Three community workshops and two public study sessions with the El Cerrito Parks and Recreation Commission, were held as components of the Master Plan’s community outreach, in addition to a community survey. Approximately 1,270 members of the public participated in the development of the Master Plan.

THEMES IN DEMAND

From the community outreach process, strong themes were identified regarding the community’s interests for the City’s recreation network.

- Overall, the community is satisfied with the City’s existing supply of and access to parks and recreation facilities and programs
- Many community members view the Hillside Natural Area and Ohlone Greenway as valued recreation amenities that are unique to El Cerrito
- There is a desire to update and improve the City’s existing recreation facilities and programs, to modernize and to meet demands in use
- There is a strong desire for improved general maintenance in the City’s parks – restrooms, waste removal, etc.
- The community is interested in pedestrian access throughout the City’s recreation network – walking and biking

- The community is interested in supporting youth recreational programming – toddler amenities, teen programming, youth enrichment opportunities

In addition to these themes the community outreach process also identified the community’s preferred recreation 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 classes, before- and after-school childcare, preschool age programming, specialty camps, summer camps, and sports. Additionally, high levels of use were reported for outdoor active spaces such as playgrounds, fields, the Swim Center, and trail use/nature observation. See Appendix D for detailed information in the Community Engagement Summary.
4.2 SUPPLY

EXISTING PARKS AND RECREATION FACILITIES

The City provides an adequate quantity of park and recreation facilities for its community. However, their active use exacerbates deferred maintenance projects throughout the dated and aging system and requires significant attention in order to continue serving existing and growing recreation demand. 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 total 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.

RECREATION PROGRAMS ASSESSMENT

Overall the Recreation Department programs, activities, and events are well received and broadly supported by the community with the depth and range of program offerings responsive to community needs, particularly supporting prioritized youth programming. However, while City staff is effective in scheduling the use of limited resources, there are segments of the community that are not adequately served. The limited supply of amenities, combined with the extensive repairs and updates they require, further impacts the potential for program expansion to meet existing and future recreation needs.

A recreation programs assessment was completed to review programs provided by the City, understand the community’s priorities for recreation services, and identify underserved or unmet needs. The following are key findings from this assessment. See Appendix C for additional information regarding the recreation program assessment of the Master Plan.

• 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, 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 gymnasium 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.

• Serving the recreational needs of Baby Boomers (54-72 years) presents a significant challenge for the City. Boomers comprise one-quarter of the community’s population (25.3%). 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 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.

### 4.3 ADDRESSING THE GAP

#### MEETING COMMUNITY DEMAND

The renovation, upgrade, and maintenance of existing facilities are integral to achieving the City’s objectives. Community engagement for the Master Plan reveals that, though the community is very satisfied with the existing recreation system, there is a strong desire for improved conditions of the City’s parks and facilities and upgraded routine and annual maintenance. The community desires timely repair and renovation maintenance of public facilities so that they are attractive, dynamic and available for use. Once maintenance standards are formed for repair and renovation and sustainable funding is established, the community will be able to address unmet demands and future needs in recreation.

To meet demand, creating additional facility access through reliable and viable public and private partnerships also remains a high priority. The City may consider acquisition and development of partnerships, as well as researching infill development opportunities to address some of these shortages and consider smaller projects. With limited available financial resources, meeting community demand for recreation amenities is both a short- and long-term challenge requiring strategic planning and broad community support.