

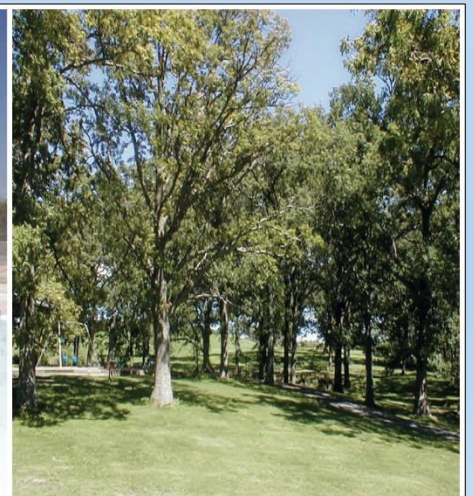


PARK SYSTEM MASTER PLAN HARVARD, ILLINOIS

A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR IMPROVING HARVARD'S PARK SYSTEM

DECEMBER, 2015

Prepared by: Camiros, Ltd.



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Chapter 1: Introduction, Park System Inventory and Existing Conditions

1.1 Background

The Harvard Park System Master Plan is a comprehensive plan for park facilities and recreation programming to serve the community over the next twenty years. The Plan includes an assessment of needs, current facilities, and budget/financial resources to chart a future course for the park system. The Plan also considers the role of non-profit organizations who organize the youth sports leagues, as well as the recently established Harvard Park Foundation. The planning process included meaningful public involvement as a means of identifying park system enhancements most meaningful to community residents.

The intent of this Plan is to provide clear guidance on steps the City of Harvard should take to improve the park system. The park system is an important component of City services and is a major factor in Harvard's quality of life, and the level of satisfaction residents have in living in the community. It is essential that the Plan delineate park and recreation improvements the community can implement and can afford. As discussed within the Plan, the park system is operated by the City of Harvard and is not a separate unit of government. Funding for the park system has been constrained by the City's structural budget problems. The City is not able to fund the parks to an optimal level. Consequently, this Plan must be based on budget realities to show how significant enhancement to the park system can be made within the limits of the City's budget constraints.

History. This Plan is the first park system master plan for Harvard. The City has operated a parks and recreation department since 19__, which was the first year the City budget contained a separate budget category for parks and recreation. In the early years of Harvard's development, parks and recreation was not a major consideration. The only public park within the older core area of Harvard is Mary Ayer Park, a one-square block park located a block south of the Union Pacific railroad. Schools within the older core area, such as Central Elementary School, Washington School, and St. Joseph's School, included playgrounds and play fields that provided some community access to active recreation facilities.

As Harvard grew, additional land was set aside for park and recreation uses. The land available for new park space was located on Harvard's periphery, and this is where the bulk of park facilities are located. Ideally, additional park facilities would be located within the central area of the City, particularly the area north of the railroad tracks. Figure 1, Growth of the Park System, illustrates the sequence of the growth of Harvard's park system.

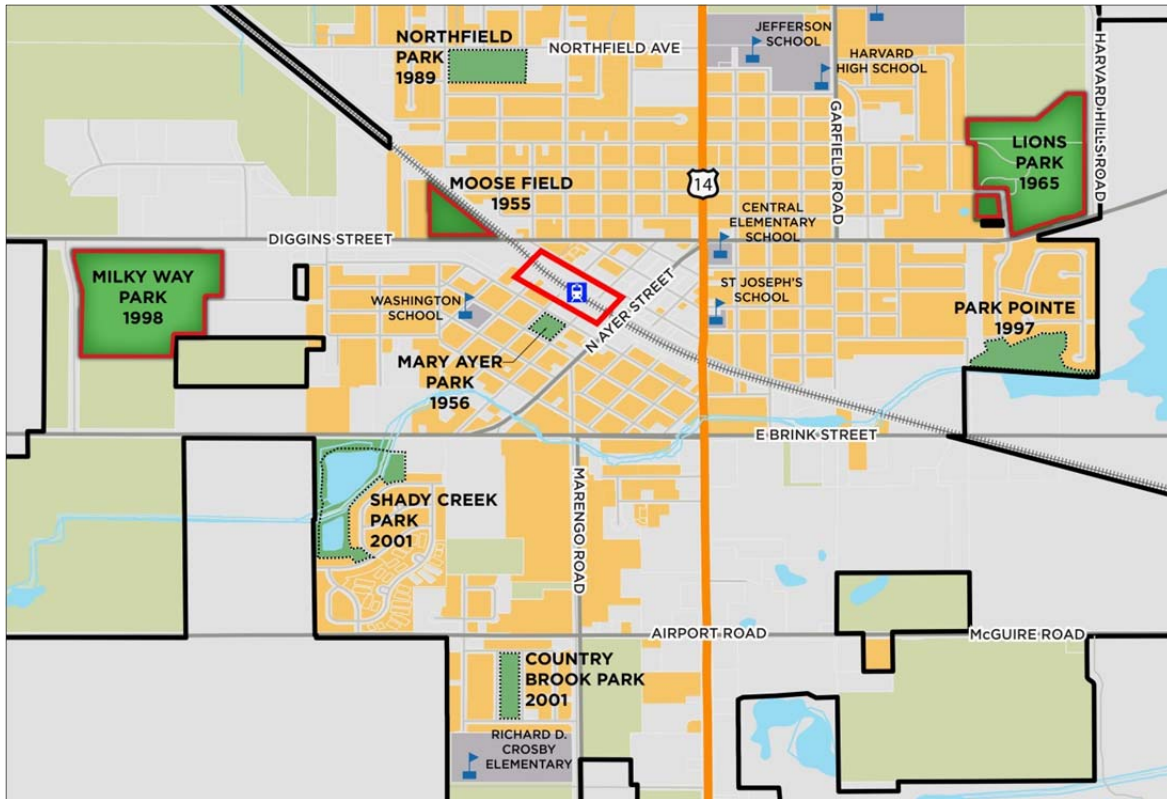


Figure 1
Growth of the Park System

The park system was not historically a priority for the City, and park facilities services lag behind those in other communities. In funding this Plan, the City of Harvard signifies a greater emphasis on the parks and recreation system as an important element of the quality of life in the community. Other actions on the part of the City also demonstrate greater emphasis on parks and recreation. The City encouraged the formation of the Harvard Parks Foundation as means to supplement its own resources for the improvement of the system. The City also recognizes the contributions of the youth sports organizations to providing recreational opportunities for the young people of Harvard. Given the City's budget limitations, and the need for efficient government services throughout the community, the City seeks to promote cooperation with other stakeholders including Harvard Community School District 50. This Plan addresses how all stakeholders can work together to improve park and recreation services to benefit the whole community.

1.2 Inventory of Recreational Facilities

The park system inventory performed as part of this Plan was intended to help identify deficiencies in the system which should be addressed in the Plan as well as system strengths. Given the relatively low emphasis given to the parks and recreation system historically, and the low level of funding for the system, deficiencies in the system are bound to exist. However, the system also has some significant strengths. This section of the Plan documents the current system, followed by a SWOT analysis intended to frame needs for system improvements. Key attributes of the land area within the current system are presented below:

- The total land area of all parks in the system is 128.66 acres.
- This total land area in parks equals approximately 12.2 acres per 1,000 Harvard residents.
- While no set standard currently exists for the ratio of park land to the resident population, a former standard of 10 acres per 1,000 residents was widely accepted in past years.
- It is clear that the amount of land within the park system is one of the system's strengths.
- Having significant land area within the parks system is only one part of meeting recreational needs. Providing facilities within these park lands is also needed.
- Significant undeveloped land exists within these park lands for the development of new facilities.

Current Facilities. Harvard's park system is comprised of nine parks covering 128.66 acres of land. Figure 2, Current Park Facilities Matrix, lists the nine parks, their individual land areas and the recreational facilities located within each park. Two of the parks, Lions Park and Milky Way Park, are considered "district-level parks" because they provide recreational facilities that serve the entire community. Within Lions Park are the Harvard Pool and the Harvard Library, which serve the entire community. Milky Way Park is the largest park (55 acres) and is home to athletic fields for the soccer, football, and baseball programs, which also serve the entire community. Figure 3, Current Park Facilities Map, illustrates the location of each park within the community.

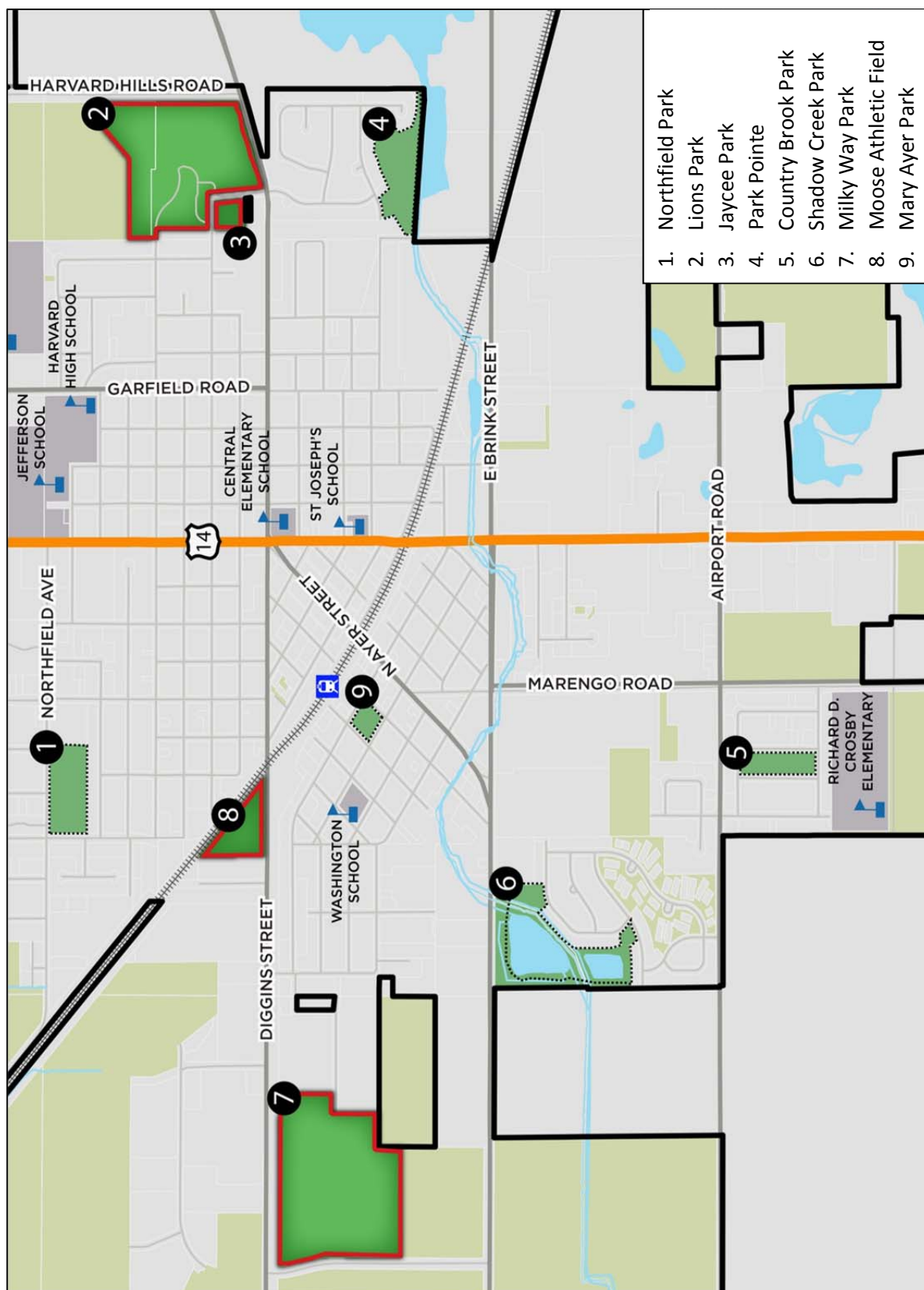
While Figure 2 lists the recreational activities supported at each park, not all facilities in each park are in good enough condition to support actual use. For example, the tennis courts at Northfield Park and Shadow Creek Park need resurfacing and the netting needs repair, leaving no serviceable tennis courts in the system. Similarly, while two parks have ponds for fishing and boating, access to the water via piers or boat launches is poor or non-existent, making these amenities unusable. Also, while indoor recreation is shown as available at Lions Park, these facilities are small and facilitate only exercise classes and meeting rooms. Three recreational activities, dog park, natural areas, and skate park, represent activities currently in demand in other communities but are not provided for within Harvard's system.

Figure 2
Current Park Facilities Matrix

PARKS	FACILITIES/ACTIVITIES																	
	Acres	Baseball/Softball	Basketball (outdoors)	Batting Cages	Disc Golf	Dog Park	Fishing Pier	Football	Gazebo	Ice Skating Rink	Indoor Recreation	Natural Areas	Open Field	Parking Lot	Playground	Ponds/Water	Pool	Shelters/Picnic Area
NORTHFIELD PARK	7.92								X				X	X	X			
LIONS PARK	35.00	X			X					X				X			X	X
JAYCEE PARK	2.15																	X
PARK POINTE	6.70		X				X					X		X		X		
COUNTRY BROOK PARK	3.20								X				X					
SHADOW CREEK PARK	9.80		X									X	X	X		X		
MILKY WAY PARK	55.00	X						X					X	X			X	
MOOSE ATHLETIC FIELD	6.99	X		X										X			X	
MARY AYER PARK	1.90		X														X	

Source: Camiros, Ltd.; City of Harvard

Figure 3
Current Park Facilities Map



Forest Preserve Facilities. In addition to park facilities provided as part of the City of Harvard Park and Recreation Department system, the McHenry County Conservation District also has open space and natural preserve facilities located close enough for Harvard residents to use and enjoy. The Rush Creek Conservation Area is located adjacent to Harvard's city limits to the southeast and is 714 acres in size. Rush Creek offers hiking, camping, fishing, horseback riding trails, snowmobile trails and picnic facilities, which complement recreational activities offered within Harvard's park system. Also, the Stone Mill Trail, which connects Milky Way Park to the Beck's Woods Conservation Area, offers an attractive regional trail experience to Harvard residents at Harvard's largest park. McHenry County facilities surrounding Harvard are shown on Figure 4, Nearby McHenry County Conservation Areas. While these facilities are not located within the City of Harvard and are, therefore, not as accessible, they do offer important recreational opportunities to Harvard residents and are included in the assessment of recreational facilities. Improving access to these County facilities would increase the range of recreational opportunities available to Harvard residents with little cost to the City of Harvard.

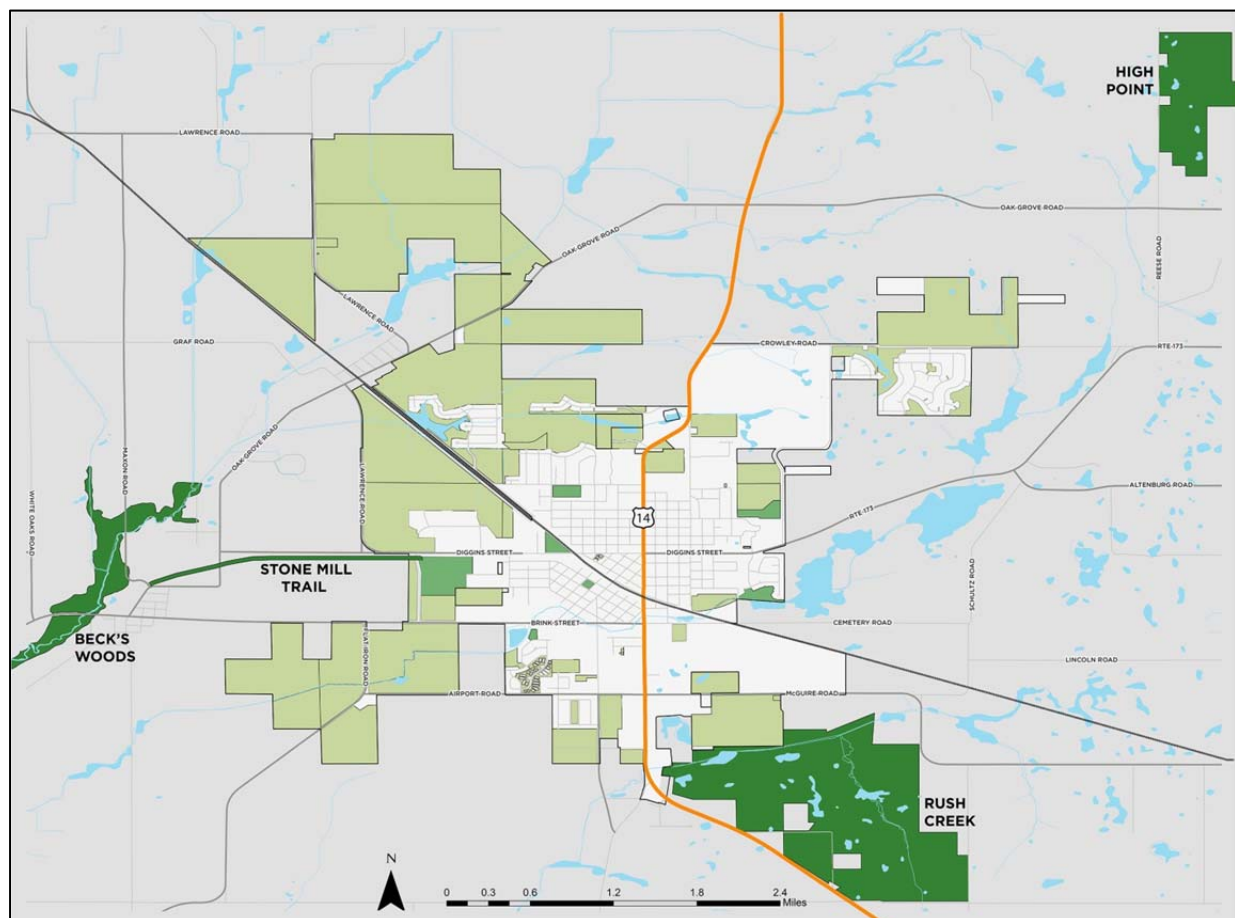


Figure 4
Nearby McHenry County Conservation Areas

Harvard Community School District 50 Facilities. In this comprehensive assessment of community recreational facilities it is important to recognize the recreational facilities of School District 50. The recreational facilities of the district are in place to serve the needs of students within the district, and are not part of the City's park and recreation system. This said, some of the District's facilities may

provide recreational opportunities to average Harvard residents. Typically, schools allow impromptu use of lawn areas/recreational fields by local residents, such as ball throwing, dog walking, Frisbee throwing, etc. Indoor gymnasiums are used by the City of Harvard for its winter basketball program, with compensation provided to the District by the City. The District uses baseball fields at Milky Way Park for baseball practice. Thus, while the District's facilities are not part of the park and recreation system, the facilities provide some benefit to average Harvard residents and some cooperation exists between the City and the District on sharing facilities, which could be expanded if the need or opportunity presents itself. School locations are shown on Figure 2.

1.3 Volunteer Youth Sports Organizations

The volunteer youth sports organizations play an important role in the community to provide children in Harvard with significant recreational opportunities through their efforts to organize and manage youth sports leagues. These groups donate a great deal of time and effort to organize and manage the sports leagues and perform maintain on the athletic fields. These groups have been in place for many years and are part of Harvard's youth recreation heritage. While demand for recreation shifts over time, there will always be a desire for kids in the community to play organized sports. These groups provide these opportunities in a manner that is both cost efficient and high quality. The basic format of the groups is for the volunteers to organize and manage the leagues, which are played at City of Harvard parks. To date, the City has charged no fees for these groups to use the park facilities, and the City and the groups coordinate on maintenance. It should be noted that these groups perform their own fundraising and use some of the funds to improve the athletic fields on which the games are played. The volunteer youth sports organizations include the following:

- Harvard Boys League (boys baseball)**
- Harvard Junior Tackle Football**
- Harvard Hers League (girls softball)**
- Harvard Soccer League (boys and girls leagues)**

Other youth sports organizations also provide organized sports leagues for kids. ***The Harvard Junior Hornets Basketball League*** offers organized basketball to boys in grades 5-8. The league is organized by the City of Harvard Parks and Recreation Department and games are played at Harvard Junior High School. In addition, the ***Harvard Wrestling Club*** offers organized wrestling activities for kids. The Harvard Wrestling Club is closely linked to the wrestling teams at Harvard High School and Harvard Junior High school. Activities are conducted at School District 50 facilities. In addition to the youth sports organizations, there is also a ***Harvard Men's Softball League*** that uses City parks for its games.

1.4 Budget Framework

Planning for Harvard's park system requires a clear recognition of the budget framework for the Parks and Recreation Department as well as for the City as a whole. Since the park system is operated as a department within City government, funding for the park system is influenced by the fiscal condition of the City of Harvard. Funding for the Park and Recreation Department is discretionary, that is, up to the City to determine what level of funding should be provided and for what purposes. This is in contrast to other budget categories, like employee pension contributions, which are mandated by State of Illinois regulations. Other budget categories, like police services and garbage pick-up, are not mandated by the

State specifically, but require certain funding commitments in order to provide basic minimum levels of service to safeguard the public's health and safety.

The City of Harvard has been subject to particularly severe budget constraints over the last five to seven years. The Great Recession and the accompanying fall of real estate values impacted Harvard's budget significantly. Harvard's municipal revenues are dependent on real estate property tax revenues for a large share of total municipal revenue. When property tax revenue declined due to the drop in values caused by the recession, Harvard was not able to compensate for the lost revenue because the State limits municipalities' ability to raise property taxes. At the same time property tax revenue declined, Harvard's required contributions to employee pension funds rose significantly. The result has been a budget framework that is very constrained, particularly for discretionary budget categories.

The impact on funding for the Parks and Recreation Department has been severe. Real spending on the Parks and Recreation Department has declined in each of the last five years, as shown in Figure 5, City of Harvard Budget History. City funding for the park system was never robust. In fact, Harvard residents are taxed far less than other McHenry County communities for park services. Harvard's 2015 parks budget allocated approximately \$10.00 per capita of population, which is far less than nearby communities such as McHenry (\$70), Crystal Lake (\$125), and Woodstock (\$180).

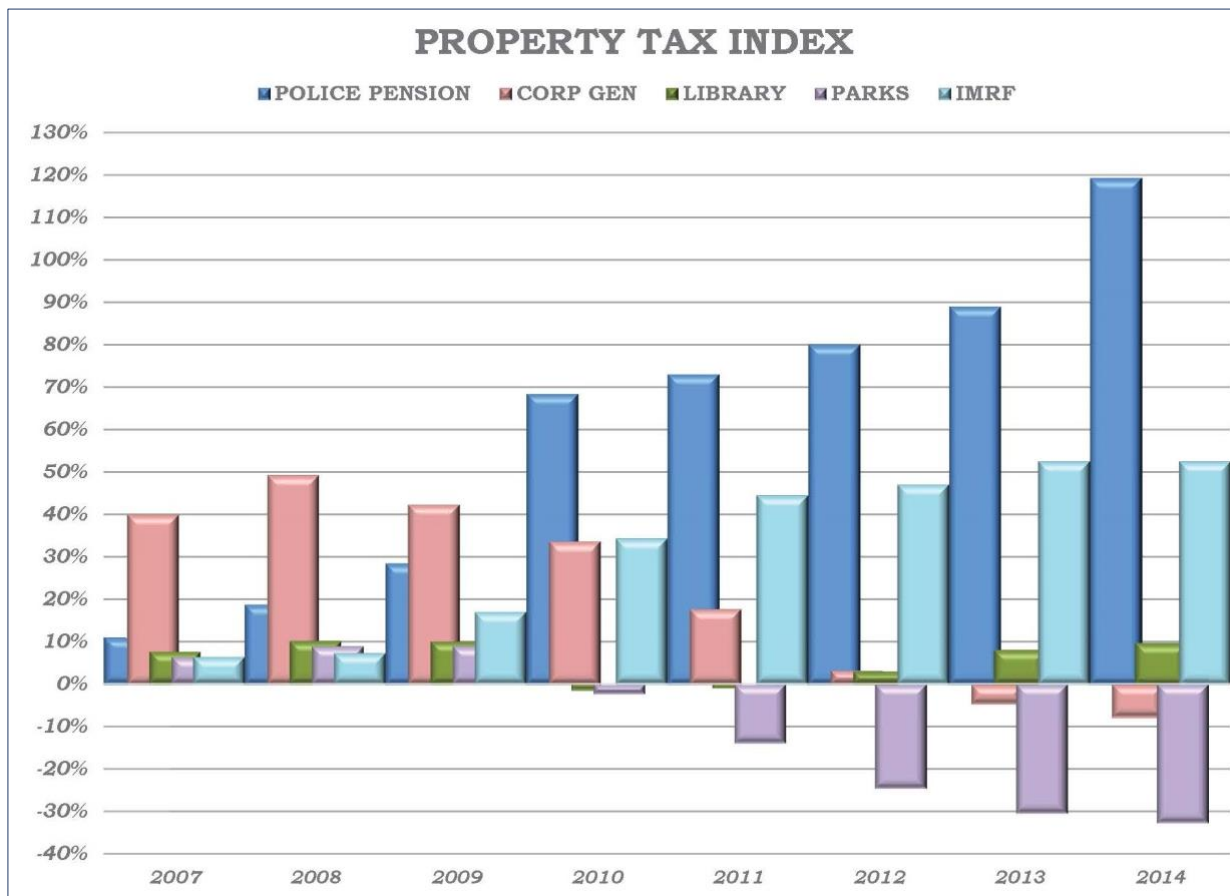


Figure 5:
City of Harvard Budget History
 Source: City of Harvard

Clearly, planning for Harvard's park system must take into account the City's significant budget constraints. The City's budget condition is not likely to improve in the foreseeable future. Without additional funding, improvement of the park system is not feasible. Given that increased funding from the City through its normal budget is not feasible, two options exist for providing the increased funding needed to improve the park system. One option would be for the voters in Harvard to approve a referendum to create a separate park district, which would be a new unit of local government with its own elected board and its own property tax levy. The second option would be for the voters to approve a referendum to establish a permanent property tax surcharge dedicated to funding the park system. This property tax surcharge would be collected by the County and sent to the City of Harvard for exclusive use in providing park facilities and recreational services. Both options involve significant public discussion. How additional funds are provided to improve the park system is not relevant to this Plan. It is important to recognize that the plan must assume some level of increased funding, for without increased funding, there is no point in formulating a plan for improving the park system.

1.5 Recreation Programming

In addition to providing park facilities for use by residents and organized groups, the City's Park and Recreation Department is also responsible for providing recreation activities desired by residents. Currently, the Department has one full time staff person, Mike Clingingsmith, who is the superintendent of the department and organizes all programming/activities. Currently, the activities offered through the department consist of the following:

- Travel Basketball
- Instruction Basketball Program
- Horseback Riding Lessons
- Archery
- Golf Lessons, Indoor and Outdoor
- Fastpitch Softball Clinics
- Winter Water Aerobics
- Summer Water Aerobics
- Swimming Lessons



The range of activities offered is broad considering the limited resources the City has allocated for recreation programming. Many of the activities list above employ part time instructors, which is an efficient way to operate these programs. The other source of recreation programming is through volunteer youth sports organizations, described in Section 1.4 of this chapter. Additional activities are needed within the system, particularly for adults and for children not interested in sports.



1.6 SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis was performed to help assess goals and strategies for park system improvement. The term SWOT stands for ***strengths, weaknesses, opportunities*** and ***threats***. A SWOT analysis helps to focus priorities in the planning process by identifying the key factors central to a successful park system.

SWOT analysis originated in the practice of business management and has long been used in the field of community planning. A SWOT analysis examines internal and external factors that will affect future performance. In this case, future performance is focused on the parks and recreation system, but has implications for the community as a whole because it is a major component of Harvard's quality of life.

Strengths and Weaknesses are considered internal factors, which can be addressed by the City and the Parks and Recreation Department.

Opportunities and Threats are considered external factors, which are beyond the direct control of the City and must be recognized as such in the planning process.

A summary of the SWOT analysis, which was presented to the Parks Committee, is provided below.

Strengths: significant strengths exist as the foundation for system improvement.

1. Land Area within the Park System

- Total land area within the system is 128.66 acres
- Land in park area = 12.2 acres per 1,000 residents
- This ratio exceeds the former standard of 10 acres per 1,000 residents
- Significant undeveloped land exists within the park system for new facilities

2. Harvard Pool Facility

- Harvard has a quality pool facility, unlike many communities its size
- Pool facility represents a major capital cost, and is almost paid for
- The pool facility is highly valued by residents and provides summer recreation for the entire community



3. Volunteer Organizations

- The volunteer groups that run the sports leagues represent a major asset.
- They not only organize participation, they help maintain the park facilities they use.
- These groups also make improvements to park facilities.
- These groups conduct successful fund raising to support their leagues, which is an important source of funds.



4. Cost Efficiency

- Budget constraints have forced Harvard to operate its parks and recreation system on a shoestring.
- While the system has its weaknesses, it is run cost efficiently.
- This cost efficiency may be taken for granted in the community.

5. Nearby McHenry County Conservation Areas

- Four McHenry County Conservation Areas are located close enough to be used by Harvard residents.
- The Rush Creek Conservation Area is located adjacent to the City's southern boundary and contains 714 acres of natural area.
- These Conservation Areas do not take the place of City parks, but offer a different and complimentary recreational experience.



Weaknesses: resulting from past under emphasis of the park system

1. Budget Constraints

- Budget constraints are responsible for many of the park system's weaknesses.
- Resolution of the budget issue will require a change in the current framework.
- Voter approval of some form of increased tax revenue devoted to park systems improvement and operations is needed.

2. Poor Maintenance

- Park maintenance is poor due to budget constraints.
- Basic maintenance, such as grass cutting, is done less frequently or not at all in some parks.
- Poor maintenance of the parks reflects poorly not only on the park system, but on community as a whole.
- Current maintenance compromises the usability of some facilities.
- Deferred maintenance can be seen on some park buildings, such as the pool building in Lions Park.
- The low budget for maintenance precludes planting flowers or landscape enhancement at the parks.



Basketball court at Mary Ayer Park, which lacks court painting and striping

3. Limited Facilities/Activities

- The current park system is very basic; consists only of necessities.
- Some basic facilities/activities are not provided.
- Some facilities within the system are not usable due to poor condition, maintenance or design.

4. Poor Design and Appearance

- Harvard's parks are not very attractive or well designed.
- Little consideration was given for the arrangement of improvements within the parks.
- The aesthetic quality of the parks is very poor. Simple flower beds (shown at right) are not part of the system.
- Budget constraints not solely responsible.
- Poor park design and appearance is not a matter of cost efficiency, but a lack of concern for visual quality.
- Volunteers might be a resource for aesthetic enhancement of the parks through planting flowers & landscaping.



5. Poor Coordination

- The effective use of existing recreational resources would be enhanced through good coordination between the various stakeholders within the system.
- Poor coordination and communication currently exists between the City and volunteer groups.
- Poor coordination results in less effective maintenance.
- Poor coordination results in less effective teamwork.
- Simple written documents outlining responsibilities of the parties would help resolve the situation.

6. Underdeveloped Neighborhood Parks

- The current system over-emphasizes the larger system parks.
- Neighborhood parks are needed for impromptu recreation.
- Over-emphasis on larger system parks decreases accessibility to parks and activities.
- Improved maintenance and facilities are needed to make neighborhood parks effective.

7. Not Changing with the Times

- Current system is much like it was 40 years ago.
- Recreational activities are focused on sports leagues.
- The system has not changed to reflect current demographics.
- The system focused on youth recreation; there is little recreation for adults.
- No adaptation to reflect social changes.

Opportunities: *viable prospects exist for improving the park system*

1. Existing parks hold good potential for enhancement /improvement.
2. Significant open areas existing within the parks to accommodate new facilities.
3. Options exist to fix the budget constraints that undermine the park system.
4. There appears to be widespread public support for improving the park system.
5. Improved cooperation with volunteer organizations could result in major improvements.

Threats: *external forces could hamper improvement efforts*

1. While options exist to fix the budget issue, they require voter approval.
2. Public support for parks must be sustained to realize improvements.
3. The benefits of cooperation depend on overcoming past practices.

1.7 Summary of Existing Conditions

Harvard's existing park and recreation system exhibits a combination of positive and negative qualities. Among the positive qualities are the size/land area in the park system, the efforts of the volunteer youth sports organizations, and the cost efficiency of the current system. Among the negative qualities are generally poor maintenance, poor design/arrangement of facilities within the parks, poor aesthetics and few options for recreation programming.

Many of the negative qualities of the current park system involve lack of adequate funding. The funding issue is clearly the biggest threat to an improved park system. While there are structural issues in the City's budget framework that limit park funding, there exist options for park funding outside the budget framework. Putting one of these options for additional funding into effect will require voter approval.

Another way to view the shortcoming of the current park and recreation system is in terms of priorities and values. Improvement of the park system has not been a priority with City government, historically. This may reflect the values of the community. Community attitudes reflect an emphasis on cost efficiency and a "no frills" approach to municipal services. Clearly, further investment in the park system is discretionary, meaning it is not absolutely necessary. However, "discretionary" should not be interpreted as "unimportant." Some of the most valued aspects of community life are discretionary. People, and communities, pick and choose what they want to invest in because there are typically not enough funds to invest in everything. In Harvard, people have the choice of investing in a better park system, or not. This Plan must be based on some level of increased funding, because without additional funding the system cannot be improved.

Chapter 2: Community Involvement and Visioning

2.1 The Community Involvement Process

Community involvement is a critical part of the master planning process. Involving the community is necessary to effectively deliver a plan for a community-oriented park and recreation system. The process of community involvement was carefully planned at the outset of the project to ensure that the public comment would be received and play a key role in the formulating the master plan. The process of involving the community in the master planning process included the following elements;


- 1) **Key Person Interviews:** People directly involved with the use and operation of the park system were interviewed to learn about the system worked, and concerns people had with the system. These interviews included people such as: a) the parks superintendent; b) members of the volunteer youth sports organizations; c) a member of the Harvard Parks Foundation; d) elected officials; and e) a representative of School District 50.
- 2) **Parks Committee Meetings:** Meetings were held with the Harvard Parks Committee, comprised of members of the City Council and appointed members of the community. These meetings were held with public notice provided and were open to the public.
- 3) **Parks Master Plan Website:** A website was designed to promote public involvement in the planning process via the digital medium. All technical analysis, meeting summaries, and interim products were uploaded to the website for public review and comment. The website also had a general question and comment section allowing anyone in the community to ask questions about the park system or make a comment.
- 4) **Visioning Session:** A major community-wide visioning session was held to gain input from residents on the current state of the park system and what they wanted it to be in the future. A PowerPoint presentation was prepared to solicit responses to a series of questions central to formulating the master plan. The input of attendees was documented through the use of key pad polling, and shown to the attendees for group discussion and reconsideration. The input received was used in forming the recommendation for improving the park system. The budget issue was included in the presentation and discussion.
- 5) **Draft Master Plan Open House:** The draft master plan was presented at a community-wide open house to allow the public to view and discuss the Plan and see how their comments made during the process were addressed. Useful public comments made during the Open House were incorporated into the final master plan.

2.2 The Visioning Workshop

The Visioning Workshop was interactive discussion about Harvard's current park and recreation system and what people want it to be in the future. The format of the session was structured around a PowerPoint presentation to elicit comments about the current park system and how it could be improved. Attendees would view slides with questions and images concerning specific aspects or issues of the park system. Attendees would then respond to the question in terms of the response scale provided on the slide. Key pad polling was used to illustrate the group's response to each question. The question and the group's response were discussed and the question was posed again for a second response, which was then documented as the final response. This format allowed each individual's response to be informed by group discussion and allowed reevaluation/reconsideration of the individual's response. An example of a slide used in the Visioning Workshop is provided below, which includes the response to the question asked: ***How important is the park system to the quality of life in Harvard?*** Responses to the entire Visioning Workshop are contained in Appendix A. Visioning Responses.


Current Park System: Importance to Community

- Different people utilize park and recreation services to different degrees.
- Some people believe park and recreation is very important to the community while others do not.



Please rank the importance of the parks system to quality of life based on the scale, below:

1. Very important
2. Important
3. Somewhat important
4. Not important



Summary of Responses

Very important	52%
Important	41%
Somewhat important	7%
Not important	

SEPTEMBER 15, 2015

HARVARD PARK SYSTEM PLAN | VISIONING WORKSHOP

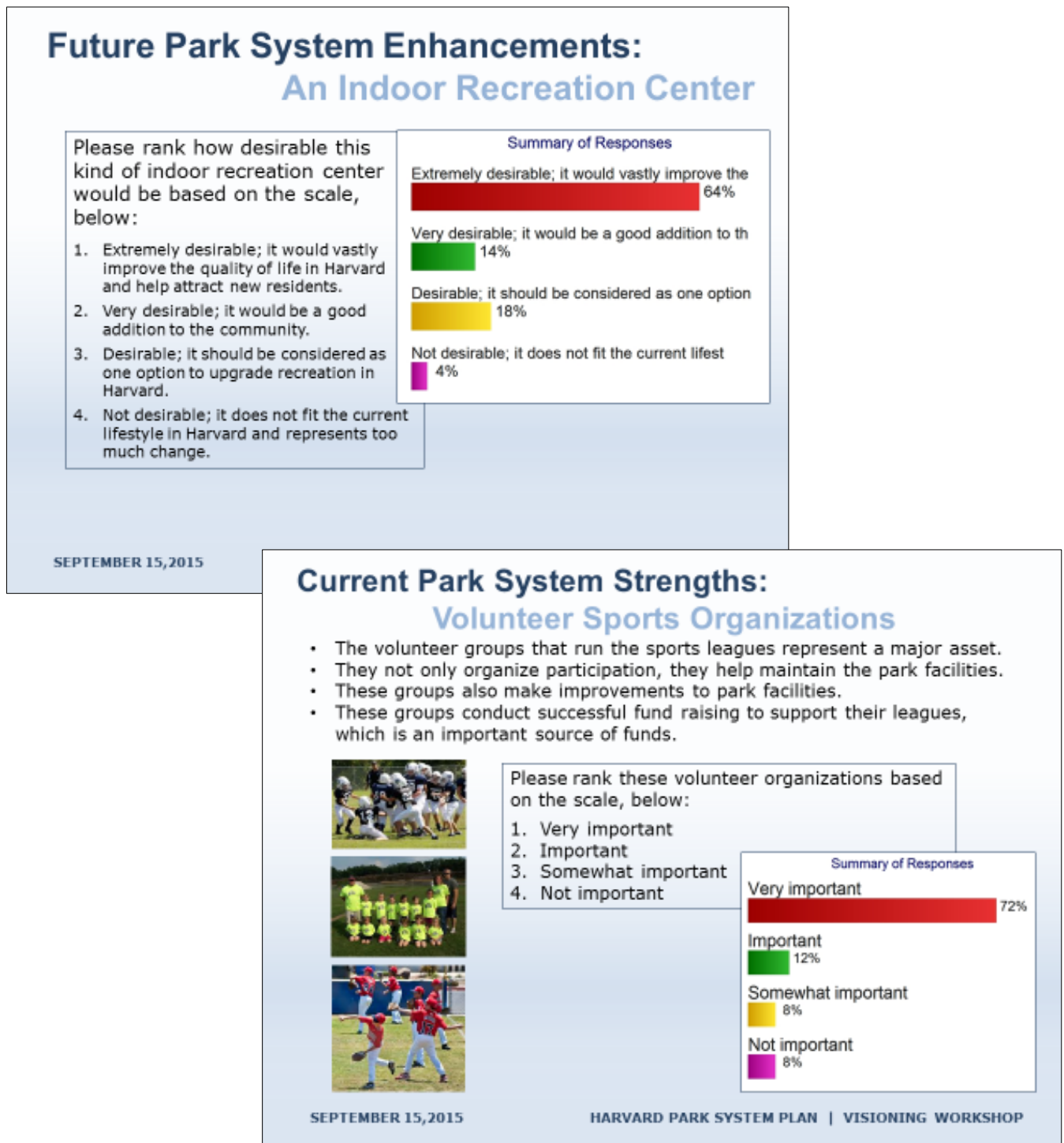
The presentation was organized into the following elements:

- Introduction
- Background
- Parks Budget
- Discussion of Current System
- Discussion of System Enhancements
- Summary; what we learned
- Next steps in the process

Visioning Input and Direction for the Master Plan. Several clear themes emerged from the Visioning Workshop that helped give direction to the park system master plan. This input included:

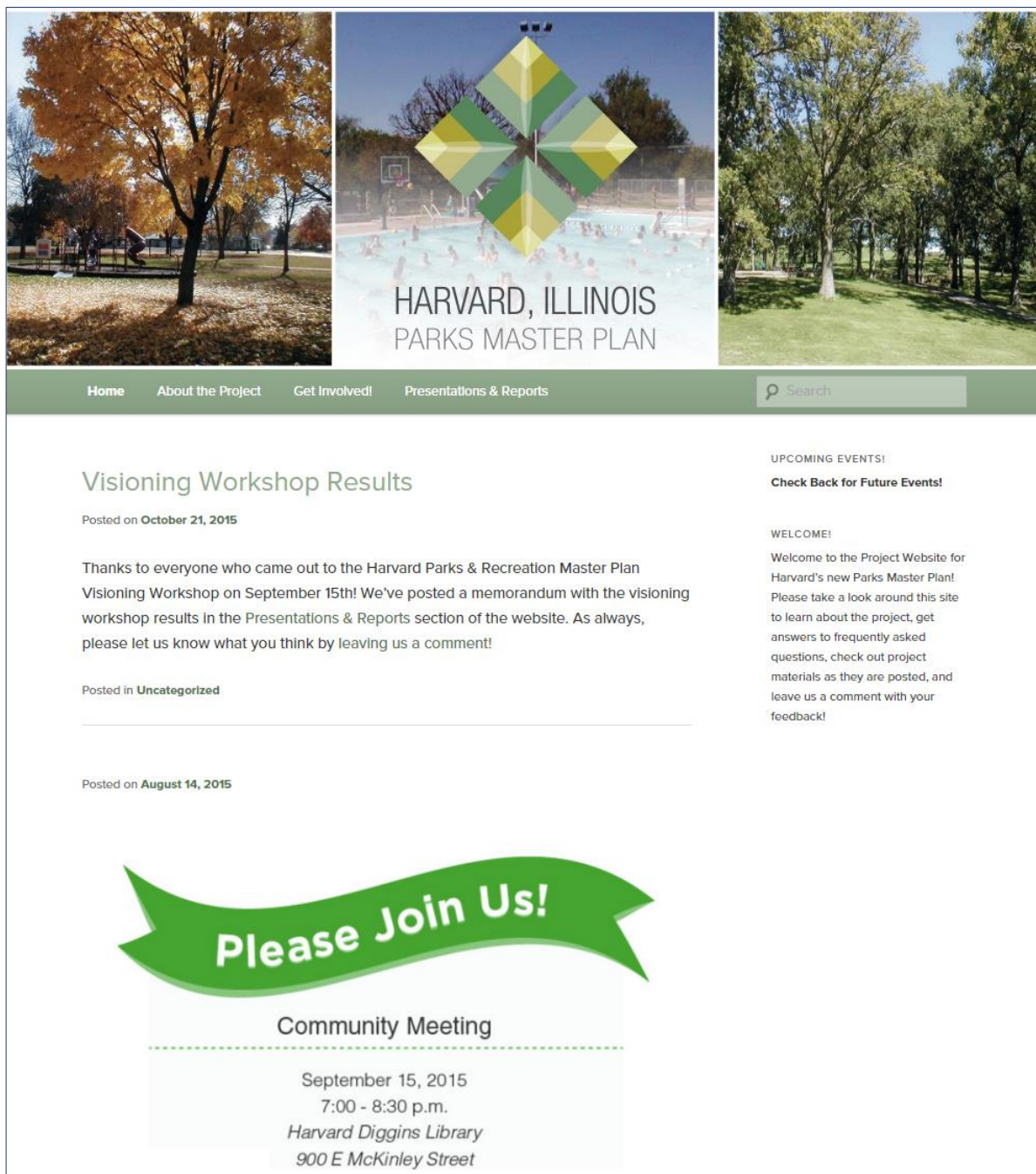
- The community has clearly stated that the parks and recreation system is very important a good quality of life in Harvard and significant upgrading of the system is desired. The consensus opinion is that the current system does not meet the needs of the community and needs improvement.
- The participants in the Visioning Session, while likely containing a large contingent of people involved in the youth sports organizations, appear to reflect the prevailing attitudes of the Harvard citizenry, by and large. The responses to the questions posed were not overly skewed in favor of improvement of the parks used by these organizations, and also appeared to reflect the orientation for common sense solutions and practicality that are strongly reflected in City governance.
- While the park and recreation system should be improved, there is no support for a “Cadillac” system. A “no frills” system that provides for the reasonable recreation needs of the community will satisfy the community.
- An indoor recreation center is clearly desirable, and would represent the focal point of the system. Some basic level of financial feasibility should be performed as part of the master plan to determine if a “no frills” indoor recreation facility is a possibility.
- Two programmatic enhancements also were points of consensus: 1) improved maintenance; and 2) improved design and aesthetics. These enhancements would improve each park in the system, making them more useable and more enjoyable.
- A large majority of participants (79%) thought the parks system had not kept pace with the times. While this question did not translate directly into a consensus for specific enhancements, the master plan would be remiss if it did not propose improvements that responded to current needs/desires.
- There was no sentiment expressed for major new facilities, other than the indoor recreation center. This would suggest that no new parks are needed, although this does not preclude additional land purchases to augment existing parks if an advantageous opportunity arises.
- Somewhat mixed signals were given for upgrading neighborhood parks. There was a slight preference given to improving the larger, community-level parks. Nonetheless, if the programmatic enhancements of improved maintenance, design and aesthetics were applied to the neighborhood parks, they would be significantly upgraded. Also, making strategic facility improvements to some of the neighborhood parks should not be ruled out based on the responses received.
- A key “additional strength” was offered during the discussion of the existing park system, which was **volunteerism**. This was interpreted to mean that volunteerism is a strength of the community, not specifically limited to the volunteer youth sports organizations. This could be an important concept for bridging the community’s desire for upgraded parks and recreation, and funding constraints.
- A second “additional strength” named was the School District, implying that the recreational assets of the district could be better leveraged to serve the entire community if a stronger cooperative relationship were developed between the City and the District.

While the general themes expressed in the Visioning Workshop needed to be translated into specific proposals for improvements, it appears that the improvement desired exceed the financial capacity of the City to make them. Given current budget constraints, any significant improvements to the system will require voter approval for a special park system tax levy. Even with general support for additional park funding, there is a limit to which voters are likely to approve a special tax levy. The improvements endorsed by workshop participants represent a significant increase in park funding needs, which may exceed the voter's appetite for a special park tax levy.



2.3 Input from the Project Website

Public comment on the project website provided another form of valuable input. This input is different from other forms of input. People who provided input on the project webpage took the initiative to go to the site to learn about the park master plan and provide suggestions/comments. This form of input is not necessarily more valuable than other forms of input, but is a complementary form within the public involvement program. Comments and suggestions received from the project website included:



Home page of the project website

- I prefer local sports for kids rather than traveling leagues
- Affordable recreation for the kids is important
- Adult recreation/workout facilities are needed
- A park located near downtown is needed; perhaps at Route 14 and Ayer
- Information on activity programming is hard to find; improvement needed
- An indoor recreation center would be a great addition. Ideally it would have an indoor track, lap pool, weight room, exercise rooms, etc.
- More outdoor trails are needed
- Lions Park is a great park to walk through in all seasons
- The parks in Harvard are fine, so hopefully this plan will not lead to overbuilding
- The Harvard Pool should have at least one lap lane for adults
- An indoor facility is needed to give kids something to do in the winter, such as batting cages, volleyball, gymnastics, etc.
- Please add more basketball courts. Basketball is a game all kids can play, adults too
- More programmed activities are needed for kids
- A dog park is needed

These comments are very useful and reflect thoughtfulness on the part of the person submitting the comment. Comments such as these usually are not isolated opinions but reflect the attitudes of many within the community. Many of these comments influenced the recommendations of the master Plan.

2.4 Summary of Public Involvement

The public involvement process produced meaningful input that help shape the recommendations of the master plan to a significant degree. The public involvement program was “right sized” for this master planning process, providing the right level of involvement for scope of the planning process. It is important to recognize that public involvement in the improvement of Harvard’s park and recreation system is just beginning. Since voter approval is needed for a special property tax levy to fund park improvement, there will be extensive public involvement in determining how much additional funding should be allocated and what it will be used for. Input from the volunteer youth organizations, the Harvard Parks Foundation and residents at large will be needed to shape the funding framework for the park system going forward.

Chapter 3: Park System Master Plan

3.1 Introduction

The Park System Master Plan for Harvard must be based on the specific needs and sensibilities of the community. While the system has important strengths, there are many aspects of the system that could be improved. Since the park system has not been a strong point of emphasis within City government, and since the community values cost-efficient/no-frills municipal services, formulating a master plan for a “Cadillac” park system would be the wrong approach. The City’s budget limitations and uncertainty regarding future voter approval of a property tax surcharge to fund the park system are other reasons to approach the master plan from a practical perspective. Yet in spite of these challenges, the residents of Harvard clearly want an improved park system. Accordingly, the Harvard Park System Master Plan is based on the following three guiding principles:

- 1. Reflect the major themes expressed through the public involvement program in the master plan.***
- 2. Formulate a master plan that is affordable for the community to build and maintain.***
- 3. Prepare a master plan that will guide the community to significant improvement of the park system.***

3.2 Key Strategies

While the three guiding principles presented above provide sound grounding for the master plan, a set of more key strategies are needed to inform the plan’s specific recommendations, which expand on these principles, are outlined below.

- A. Achieve a significant upgrade in the parks and recreation system.** Public opinion overwhelmingly indicates, and our technical analysis confirms, that a significant upgrade in the park system is needed, and the community supports some level of municipal funding to achieve this upgrade.
- B. Keep system upgrades practical and affordable.** Harvard as a community has a practical, no frills sensibility. Upgrades to the system should be clearly needed enhancements, provided in a practical manner that do not cost a lot of money. The emphasis on practical and affordable does not preclude well designed and handsome facilities.

- C. ***Improve what you have.*** The Harvard park system has enough land area to provide the recreational activities the community wants. Some small acquisition of land may be warranted to take advantage of a particular opportunity, but on the whole, the Plan should focus on upgrading the park facilities already part of the system.
- D. ***Include an indoor recreation facility in the master plan.*** It was very clear from the Visioning Workshop that adding an indoor recreation facility is the top preference for improvements to upgrade the system. In the Visioning Workshop, when participants were asked to factor in cost considerations, the indoor recreation facility was still the top priority. It must be stressed that “cost considerations” were not qualified and financing the cost of an indoor recreation facility is expected to be a major topic of discussion.
- E. ***Recognize the volunteer youth sports organizations for their major contribution to the system.*** The Harvard community has relied on the volunteer youth organizations to provide sports activities for children for many years. It is part of Harvard’s heritage. These organizations, in addition to providing sports activities for youth, engage in successful fundraising to support the sports programming. These organizations are an integral part of the provision of recreational activities in Harvard.
- F. ***Draw upon the volunteer spirit of Harvard’s citizens to improve the park system.*** The volunteer efforts of the youth sports organization are critical to the success of these groups. Camiros believes volunteerism is strong within the Harvard community, and can be harnessed to help upgrade the park system at minimal public expense. Camiros sees the Harvard Parks Foundation as the ideal organization to coordinate volunteer activities.
- G. ***Coordinate with Harvard School District 50 to share facilities, costs and programming.*** Coordination with the School District was not specifically addressed in the Visioning Workshop, but was raised by participants as a potential strength of the community. Coordination with Harvard School District 50 to share facilities, costs and programming is a strategy that aligns with the “practical and affordable” sensibility that runs through Harvard. The Plan should include this as a potential strategy to lower costs and improve access to facilities and activities.
- H. ***Make the parks more enjoyable through better design and aesthetics.*** A large majority of the participants in the Visioning Workshop indicated that improving the existing parks through better design and aesthetic enhancement was needed. An example of how design and aesthetics can lead to more enjoyment of the parks should be part of the Plan.
- I. ***Modernize the park system so it is more tune with today’s community.*** This would be achieved by some of the strategies discussed above, but specific ideas and proposals for improving the currency of the park system should be included in the Plan.
- J. ***Maintenance is important.*** While it is difficult to show improved maintenance in a plan, it must be addressed, particularly when the proposed parks budget is discussed.

3.3 Budget Scenarios

The implications of all three guiding principles suggest that the foundation of the master plan should be a workable budget framework. It would be not only fruitless, but counterproductive, to prepare a master plan that outstrips the community's capacity to fund it. While any meaningful improvement to the system will require voter approval of a property tax surcharge, the assumptions of this Plan regarding the level of such funding must be realistic. One of three outcomes are likely relative to park system funding:

1. The voters reject any property tax surcharge;
2. The voters approve a continuation of the current pool levy to be used to enhance existing parks and expand activities/programming; or
3. The voters approve a property tax levy larger than the current pool levy sufficient to build and operate an indoor recreation center while also making enhancements to existing parks.

This Master Plan responds to these potential outcomes as discussed below. The first outcome may well to pass, but this outcome is not considered in the Plan because there would be no funds to carry out any changes or upgrades. If the second outcome comes to pass, the Master Plan should contain a level of improvements/upgrades to the existing parks that could be conceivably carried out by this level of funding. The third outcome should be considered because comments obtained through the public involvement program indicated that an indoor recreation facility is clearly the most desired individual upgrade by residents. The cost to build and operate an indoor recreation center would elevate the parks budget considerably.

Framing the two potential outcomes in terms of budget frameworks is important to delineate the scope of potential improvements to be include in the Plan. After discounting the "no parks funding outcome," there remain two budget scenarios:

Scenario 1: Upgrades to the Existing Parks and Recreation System; assumes future funding for the parks system equal to the annual tax levy surcharge now in place to retire the bonds let to finance the construction of the Harvard Pool, which is an annual stream of revenue of approximately \$150,000. This additional \$150,000 would be combined with the existing budget of approximately \$100,000, to form a total annual budget of \$250,000. This budget could be used for both annual operating expenses and annual payments on loans for capital improvements to the parks.

Scenario 2: System Upgrades plus Indoor Recreation Facility; assumes funding for upgrades to existing parks plus funding to build and operate a new indoor recreation facility. The budget framework needed to fund an indoor recreation facility in addition to general system upgrades will vary depending on the features incorporated into an indoor recreation center. Applying the principal of cost efficiency, the Plan assumes the facility will focus on cost efficient programming on elements such as indoor sports field w/running track, indoor gymnasium, workout room, meeting rooms, locker rooms and group instruction rooms. A "no-frills" facility of this type is assumed to have a base cost of \$4,000,000. The annual cost to finance the facility would be in the range of \$275,000 per year over 20 years. In addition, these facilities typically require an operations subsidy because user fees to not cover operating costs. The operating cost should be budgeted at \$100,000 per year. Adding the cost of facility finance and operations to the budget presented in Scenario 1 would produce a budget for Scenario 2 of \$625,000.

Scenario 1: Upgrades to the Existing Parks and Recreation System

This budget scenario assumes a series of upgrades and enhancements to the system that could potentially be funded through an increased annual park budget of \$250,000. Obviously, there are options for how to allocate this budget to achieve significant enhancement of the system. This Plan recommends that bonds be let to finance improvements to the parks in the near term. If voters approve a property tax surcharge to fund the parks, they will likely want to experience the benefits of this decision sooner rather than later. Currently, interest rates are low and the cost to finance is relatively low. This is the preferred scenario on which the master plan is based.

The upgrades to be made under this scenario would be consistent with enhancements needed to achieve significant improvement. The type of new facilities possible, and have been programmed into this scenario, include new outdoor basketball courts at some parks, improved access to fishing and boating in Shadow Creek Park and Park Point, one or two dog parks at the larger parks and a community-wide trail system. These improvements, along with improved maintenance, design and aesthetic enhancements, and additional activity programming will constitute a major improvement in the park system.

Table 1, Scenario 1- Preferred Budget Framework, provides annual target budgets for the major components of park system improvement. It must be stressed that annual budgets shown are targets, not cost estimates. These are “order of magnitude” figures based on reasonable assumptions, but not based on detailed analysis. All of these figures represent the low end of the budget spectrum, reflecting Harvard’s “no-frills” sensibility and Harvard’s ability to do more with less in terms of using its financial resources. More money could be spent on each category of improvement. For example, the “Trail System” capital cost is budgeted at \$200,000 assuming that non-paved trails will be used, which are far lower in cost than paved trails. It is expected that these figures will be refined upon discussion with the Parks Committee. This budget framework depicts the following order-of-magnitude category expenditures. Figure 6, Budget Bar Chart for Upgrades to Existing Parks, illustrates the budget graphically.

Table 1:

Scenario 1 - Preferred Budget Framework

PARK SYSTEM ENHANCEMENT	ANNUAL BUDGET
ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY PROGRAMMING	\$50,000
UPGRADES TO EXISTING PARKS ¹	\$55,000
TRAIL SYSTEM; CAPITAL COST ²	\$15,000
INDOOR REC CENTER; OPERATIONS DEFICIT	\$0
INDOOR REC CENTER; CAPITAL COST	\$0
MOD. LEVEL VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION ³	\$20,000
ADDED MAINTENANCE; CURRENT SYSTEM	\$30,000
CURRENT PARKS BUDGET	\$100,000
TOTAL NEW ANNUAL BUDGET	\$250,000

Source: Camiros, Ltd and the City of Harvard

Footnotes:

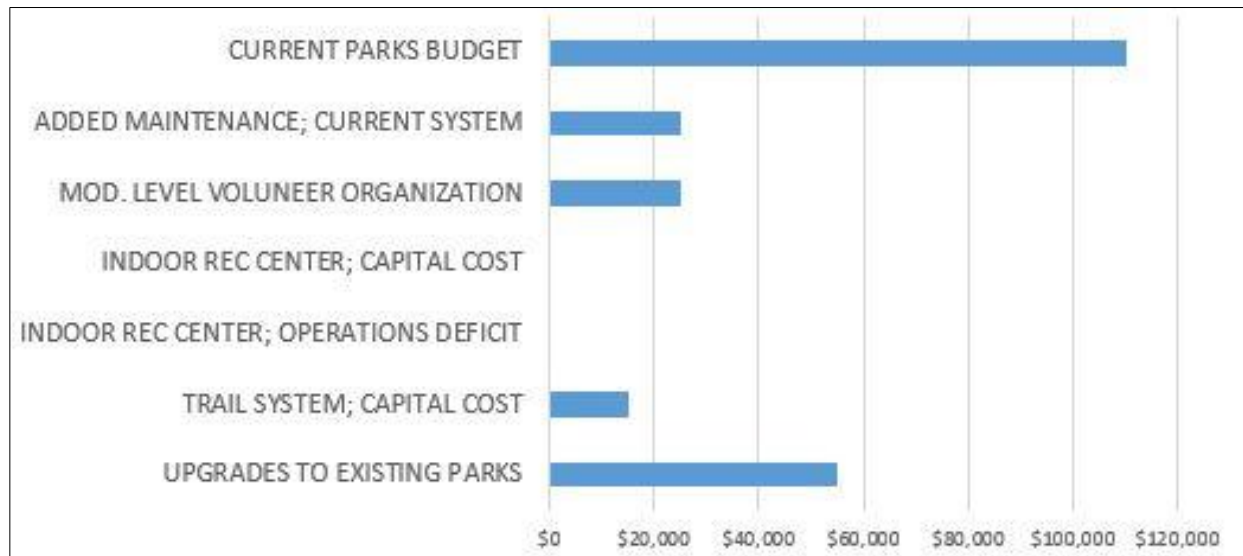
1 Capital cost assumed at \$800,000 amortized over 20 years at 3.25% interest

2 Capital cost assumed at \$200,000 amortized over 20 years at 3.25% interest

3 Value of volunteer contributions, not included in total annual budget

Figure 6

Budget Bar Chart for Upgrades to Existing Park System



The sparse offerings of programming/activities available to community residents was seen as a clear weakness of the current system in the visioning workshop and other venues for public input. The volunteer youth sports organizations provide good programs for sports, but for those who want other forms of recreation, there is not much available. This scenario will improve this situation with the \$50,000 allocated annually to “additional activity programming.” Camiros thinks these funds can be best used to hire part-time instructors for new activities. Other significant improvements to the system achievable within this budget framework include:

- Physical improvements to existing parks including new/refurbished athletic facilities, playgrounds, dog parks, leisure amenities such as barbeque/picnic facilities, and aesthetic improvements such as landscaping, flowers and signage.
- A new community-wide trail system with an earth or stone path, which could include exercise stations to facilitate adult fitness.
- The organization of expanded volunteer activities, possibly administered by the Harvard Parks Foundation, which could further expand the range of activities offered and also help raise funds for particular/special facilities within the system.
- Enhanced maintenance of the parks, recognizing that current maintenance is below standard.

Scenario 2: System Upgrades plus Indoor Recreation Facility

This more aggressive scenario was not selected as the budget framework for the master plan. Given the City budget constraints and the cost-conscious sensibilities of the community, such a large increase in the park budget was not deemed realistic. The sole difference between Scenario 1 and Scenario 2 is that Scenario 2 includes an indoor recreation center. It is understood that an indoor recreation center is the most desired addition to the park system and there may be many in the community who would like to see this facility in the plan. Its absence from the preferred budget does not preclude it from future development. Its exclusion from the budget is due to practical budget constraints, and likely limits to the voter’s support for a property tax surcharge to fund park system improvement.

Supporters of an indoor recreation center, which should include the City of Harvard, can work to build backing for the facility and help spread the cost among multiple stakeholders who may want to use the facility. This Plan recommends that the location of an indoor recreation center be one that affords convenient use by multiple stakeholders. If the facility were located within a northern expansion of Lions Park and included well-developed trails connecting to Harvard Junior High School, Harvard High School, and Washington Elementary School, School District 50 would have the option to use the facility for both physical education and extra-curricular sports teams. This location would also be convenient to Harvard Mercy Hospital, and the potential exists for the Hospital to use facilities in the recreation center for physical rehabilitation. Thus, options exist to spread the cost of the facility should there be sustained support for an indoor recreation center. The programming, design and budgeting for an indoor recreation center should be the subject of a separate study.

Table 2, **Budget Framework - System Upgrades Plus Indoor Recreation Center**, illustrates the order-of-magnitude category expenditure categories for a park system that includes an indoor recreation center. Figure 7, **Budget Bar Chart of System Upgrades Plus Indoor Recreation Facility**, illustrates the budget graphically.

Budget Framework -System Upgrades Plus Indoor Recreation Center

PARK SYSTEM ENHANCEMENT	ANNUAL BUDGET
UPGRADES TO EXISTING PARKS ¹	\$55,000
TRAIL SYSTEM; CAPITAL COST ²	\$15,000
INDOOR REC CENTER; OPERATIONS DEFICIT	\$100,000
INDOOR REC CENTER; CAPITAL COST ³	\$215,000
HIGH LEVEL VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION ⁴	\$75,000
ADDED MAINTENANCE; CURRENT SYSTEM	\$25,000
CURRENT PARKS BUDGET	\$100,000
TOTAL NEW ANNUAL BUDGET	\$575,000

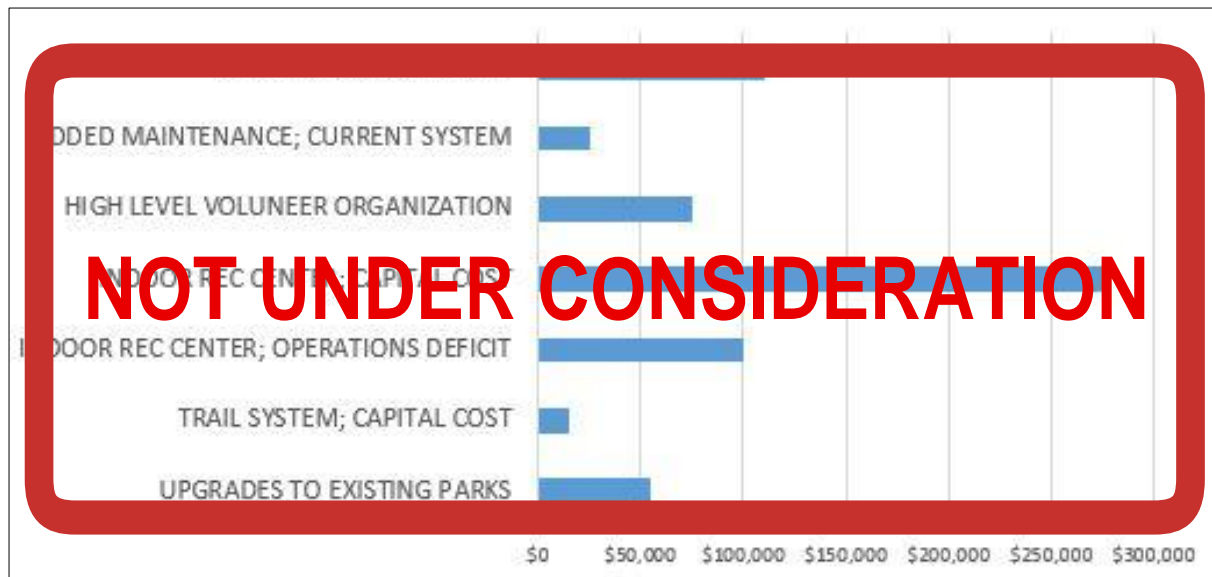
Source: Camiros, Ltd and the City of Harvard

Footnotes:

- ¹ Capital cost assumed at \$200,000 amortized over 20 years at 0.125% interest
- ³ Capital cost assumed at \$4,000,000 amortized over 20 years at 3.25% interest
- ⁴ Value of volunteer contributions, not included in total annual budget

Figure 7

Bar Chart of Budget of System Upgrades Plus Indoor Recreation Facility



3.4 Park System Facility Plan

The Harvard Park System Master Plan represents a realistic proposal for the improvement of the park and recreation system by aligning a reasonable future budget with a plan for physical improvements and increased activity programming. Figure 8, Park System Facility Plan, outlines the physical improvements proposed for the various parks. The legend for Figure 8 is explained below.

- **Recreation Facilities Improvement;** these consist of improving recreation facilities in those parks identified on Figure 8. An example would be upgrading an outdoor basketball court by resurfacing and replacement of hoops. It could also include adding leisure time facilities like barbeque pits and picnic facilities. Funds for recreational facilities improvement would come from a portion of the capital budget for *Upgrades to Existing Parks* (\$800,000) identified in Table 1.
- **Park Redesign;** this improvement consists of the rearrangement of facilities and amenities on identified parks to improve their usability and to better use the land area in the parks identified on Figure 8. Funds for park redesign would come from a portion of the capital budget for *Upgrades to Existing Parks* (\$800,000) identified in Table 1. Some redesign should be done before upgrades are made to ensure that the funds spent will provide the most improvement.
- **Aesthetic Improvement;** aesthetic improvement could take a number of forms, including landscaping, creating new natural elements, perennial or wildflower gardens, improved signage and upgraded lighting are all examples of aesthetic enhancements. All existing parks are proposed for aesthetic enhancement. Funds for aesthetic enhancement would come from a portion of the capital budget for *Upgrades to Existing Parks* (\$800,000) identified in Table 1.
- **Athletic Facility Improvement;** these improvements are specific enhancements to the athletic fields used in the youth sports programs. The improvements could be made to the athletic

- fields themselves or facility improvements such as better parking, lighting, signage, washrooms, etc. Funds for aesthetic enhancement would come from a portion of the capital budget for ***Upgrades to Existing Parks*** (\$800,000) identified in Table 1.

- **Off-Street Trail;** off-street trails are trails part of the community-wide trail system that do not utilize a street right-of-way. Some of these trails go through parks, while others go through private open space, which would require the granting of access easements by property owners. The trail surface would be natural earth, mixed with sand, mulch/wood chip, or fine gravel screenings in specific locations as needed. Funds for off-street trails would come from a portion of the capital budget for ***Community-Wide Trail System*** (\$200,000) identified in Table 1.



Off-street trail with natural earth surface

- **On-Street Trail;** on-street trails are trail part of the community-wide trail system that utilize an existing street right-of-way. On-street trails have a number of options for surfacing. A painted bicycle path on the street pavement is one option for certain locations. A preferred option would be to construct a five-foot wide trail of fine gravel screenings adjacent to the public sidewalk within existing right-of-ways. This would allow for soft surface running while the concrete sidewalk could be used for biking. Funds for off-street trails would come from a portion of the capital budget for ***Community-Wide Trail System*** (\$200,000) identified in Table 1.
- **Suggested Land Acquisition;** suggested land acquisition would involve the purchase of land to improve the system. On the whole, the Harvard Park System has sufficient land to provide for community recreation needs. The suggested land acquisitions are “soft recommendations” depending on the scope of physical improvements and increased funding, and the cost of the acquisitions are not reflected in the budget framework. Three suggested areas of land acquisition are shown on Figure 8, and discussed below:
 - a. The first potential acquisition is land north of Lions Park, owned by the School District, would be strategically important to link the park with the adjacent junior high and nearby high school and grade school. If an indoor recreation facility were built, a location in Lions Park would facilitate joint use by the nearby schools, as well as Harvard Mercy Hospital.
 - b. The second suggested acquisition is land south of Lions Park. Lions Park is the “flagship” park of the system with the pool and building, picnic grove, scenic trails, library, etc. However, the park lacks a proper, prominent entrance. This suggested acquisition would provide for a prominent entrance on a major street, Diggins Street, which is also a State highway.
 - c. The third suggested acquisition is land southeast of Milky Way Park. This land appears land-locked and maybe inexpensive to acquire. This land could support additional sports facility expansion and/or development of natural areas. It would also be useful for connecting the community trail to neighborhoods to the south and east, and allow for future programming.

Figure 8, Park System Improvement Program, outlines the proposed improvements within each existing park. New or upgraded improvements are denoted on Table 3 by the use of highlighted cells, as shown on the legend. All of the improvements represented on Figure 9 would be funded through that portion of a future property tax surcharge devoted to physical improvement of the parks. The Budget Framework suggests that \$800,000 be allocated for physical improvements. How far the \$800,000 figure will go toward making these improvements depends on many factors. It is assumed that the improvements will be done in a cost effective manner. This does not mean the absolutely lowest cost option, but getting the best value and community benefit for the funds spent. Many of the past improvements were done via the lowest cost option and some of these improvements need to be redone in order to provide quality facilities and satisfaction among users of the park system.

Figure 8
Park System Improvement Program

PARKS	FACILITIES/ACTIVITIES																			
	Acres, Existing	Acres, Existing	Baseball/Softball	Basketball (outdoors)	Batting Cages	Boat Launch	Disc Golf	Dog Park	Fishing Pier	Football	Gazebo	Ice Skating Rink	Indoor Recreation	Natural Areas	Open Field	Parking Lot	Playground	Ponds/Water	Pool	Shelters/Picnic Area
NORTHFIELD PARK	7.92	7.92	X								X			X	X	X	X			X
LIONS PARK	35.00	43.67	X				X	X				X			X	X		X	X	X
JAYCEE PARK	2.15	2.15	X																	
PARK POINTE	6.70	6.70	X		X				X					X		X	X	X		X
COUNTRY BROOK PARK	3.20	3.20									X				X					
SHADOW CREEK PARK	9.80	9.80	X		X				X					X	X	X	X	X		X
MILKY WAY PARK	55.00	75.62	X					X		X				X	X	X			X	
MOOSE ATHLETIC FIELD	6.99	6.99	X		X											X			X	
MARY AYER PARK	1.90	1.90	X														X		X	
Total Acres	128.66	157.95																		
LEGEND																				
SYSTEM PARK			X	NEW/UPGRADED FACILITY																
NEIGHBORHOOD PARK			X	NEW/UPGRADED FACILITY																

The improvements proposed for each park are discussed below. It should be noted that aesthetic enhancement of each park is recommended in addition to facility improvements.

Northfield Park improvements include: a) converting the tennis courts to basketball courts; b) adding a natural woodland area with new walking trail; c) improving the multi-use open field; d) improving the playground; and e) adding new picnic areas;

Lions Park Not all of the improvement represented on Figure 9 for Lions Park are part of the Plan's improvement program, since some of these improvements would be located on land to be acquired. Improvements to be added within the current park include: a) a dog park; b) improved picnic facilities; c) improved volleyball (summer) and ice skating rink (winter); and d)

new/added trails. Improvements to suggested acquisition land include: a) a five court tennis facility; and b) extension of the community-wide trail system north to Harvard Junior High School. If a new indoor recreation facility were built, a site on the north acquisition parcel, which is owned by the school district, would be the preferred location. A 2.5 acre acquisition parcel is suggested south of Lions Park to provide a prominent entrance at Diggins Street, which would be improved with a multi-use field area with walking path surrounding it.

Jaycee Park: This park is a specialized facility used for girls softball leagues. Improvements proposed are upgrades to this facility, which could include improve fencing, signage, lighting and user amenities.

Park Pointe: This nature park would be improved to make its natural amenities more usable. Improvements include: a) a small boat launch; b) a fishing pier; c) new playground; d) upgraded picnic facilities; and e) walking paths.

Country Brook Park: This small neighborhood park would be improved through the re-establishment of the multi-use field within the dry detention area.

Shadow Creek Park: This park functions as a combination of a nature park and an active neighborhood recreation park. The park would be redesigned to bring its facilities in line with its function and to update the facilities. Improvements would include: a) conversion of the parking lot, which is not needed, into a skate park; b) converting the tennis courts to basketball courts; c) a small boat launch; d) a fishing pier; e) new playground; f) upgraded picnic facilities; g) walking paths, and h) adding a sand volleyball court.

Milky Way Park: This park functions as the major sports park for the community, hosting football and soccer league activities and serving as a secondary site for boys baseball and girls softball games/practices. Improvement of all of these athletic fields is needed in some form. Lighting of a combination football/soccer field is also desirable. A lit baseball/softball field would also be desirable. Upgraded user amenities such as a refreshment stand, better signage, paths & trails, etc.

Moose Athletic Field: This park has a specialized function, hosting the Boys League little league baseball games and practices. The park is open to general use at other times, but the design of the park and its location make it an unlikely destination for general recreational use. The park has the potential to be an iconic little league baseball facility within the region, with some improvement. These improvement could include: a) parking lot improvements; b) better entry and facility signage; c) landscaping; d) walkways; e) improvements to spectator stands; and f) upgraded concessions area. Upgraded basic maintenance is also needed. The range of improvements to be made should be determined through discussions with Boys League representatives, with funding supplied by both the City and the Boys League.

Mary Ayer Park: This park is the only public park located in the historic core of the community. Mary Ayer Park functions as a neighborhood park with facilities including a basketball court, playground, and picnic shelter and benches. All existing facilities need improvement. Given the small size of this park and the lack of park space in the core neighborhoods, this park should be redesigned to maximize its benefit and respond to recreational needs.

3.5 Lions Park Improvements

The master plan includes detailed recommendations for a “system level park” and a “neighborhood park.” These detailed recommendations and accompanying illustrative site plans are representative of the degree of improvement recommended for the various parks within the system. The system level park selected for detailed design recommendations is Lions Park while the neighborhood park selected is Northfield Park.

Lions Park is the “flagship” park within the system, meaning it is the park that has particular significance for the entire community. Lions Park contains facilities found nowhere else within the park system, including the Harvard Pool, pool and community center building, the Harvard Library, and a winter outdoor ice skating rink. Jaycee’s Park is located adjacent to Lions Park and hosts the girls’ softball league, adding further prominence to Lions Park.

Lions Park also has a special location within the community. It is the only major park that is well linked to residential neighborhoods and is also close to community schools. Figure 9, Lions Park Location, shows the proposed Lions Park expansion and improvement in relation to other community facilities. The proposed expansion and community-wide trail would link Lions Park to three public schools: 1) Harvard Junior High School; 2) Harvard High School; and 3) Jefferson Elementary School. Lions Park is also close to Harvard Mercy Hospital. ~~The close proximity and linkage to the schools and hospital allows for potential joint use of an indoor recreation center within Lions Park, helping to reduce the capital and/or operating cost on the City.~~

Figure 10, Lions Park Improvements, illustrates how specific upgrades and new facilities might be arranged within the park. The scope of the improvements will fill significant recreational needs within the community and make the park nicer, more attractive and more satisfying for park users. Specific improvements represented on Figure 10 include:

- 1) **Expansion Lands:** Lions Park would be expanded both to the north and to the south. This is shown on Figure 10, but called out specifically on Figure 9. The northern expansion will provide space for needed new facilities and allow for the community trail to connect Lions Park to the three schools. The southern expansion will allow for a prominent park entry to be developed at Diggins Street, and also provide for a multi-use field and walking track.
- 2) **Tennis Courts:** Tennis facilities have been removed from the neighborhood parks and concentrated in Lions Park. Five tennis courts are shown on Figure 10, which are needed to support tennis team play should the Harvard High School wish to form a team or local players themselves wish to form a USTA League team. ~~The location next to a future indoor recreation facility would provide locker rooms, showers and workout facilities to make the tennis courts and quality tennis venue.~~
- 3) **Street Connection:** A new street connection is proposed within the northern expansion, linking the existing internal drive within the park to the future indoor recreation center and the new tennis courts, and extending to Harvard Hills Road. This additional street connection will make the park more accessible and more convenient to use, as well as increasing its visibility.

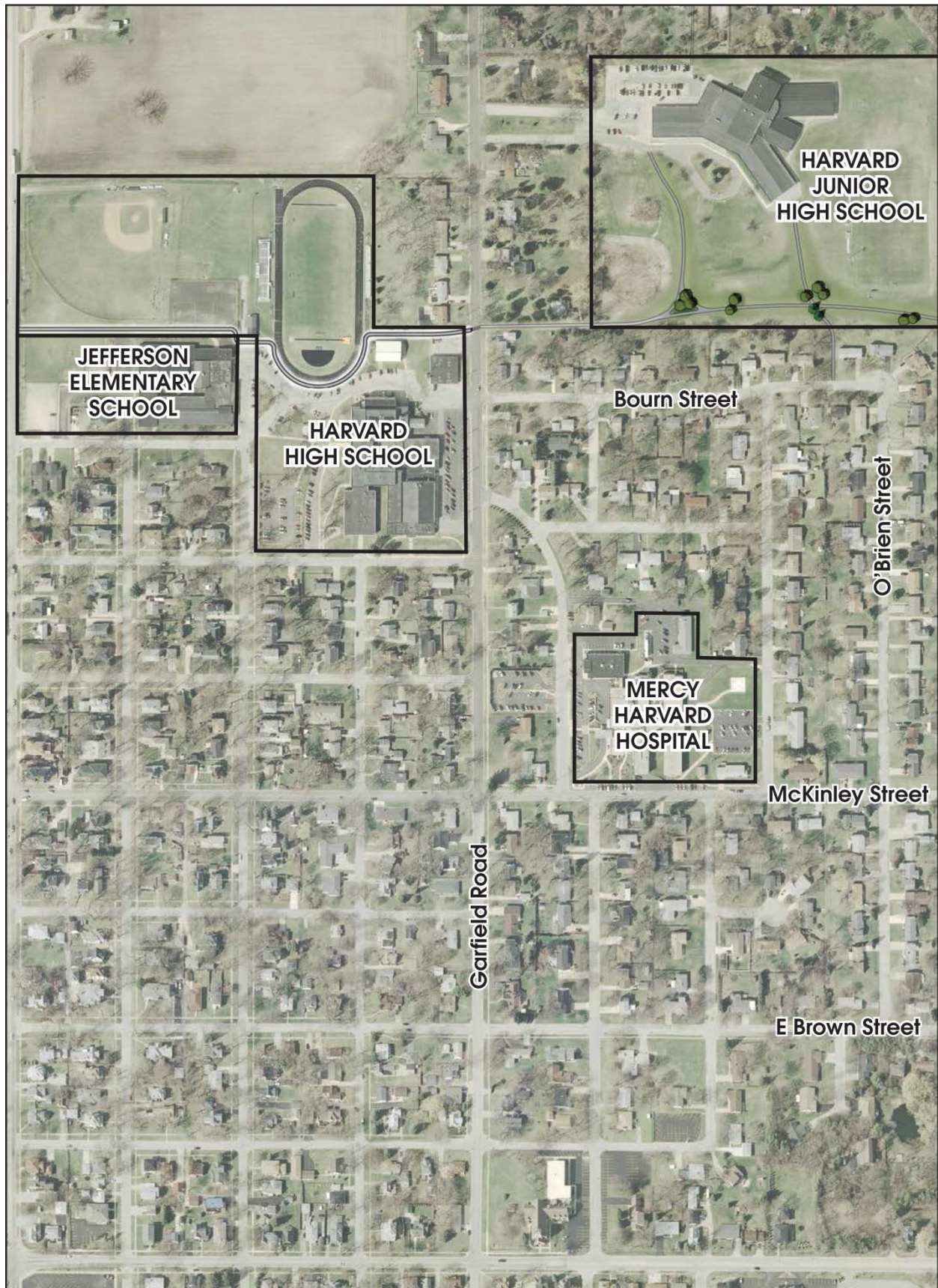




Figure 9
Lions Park Location

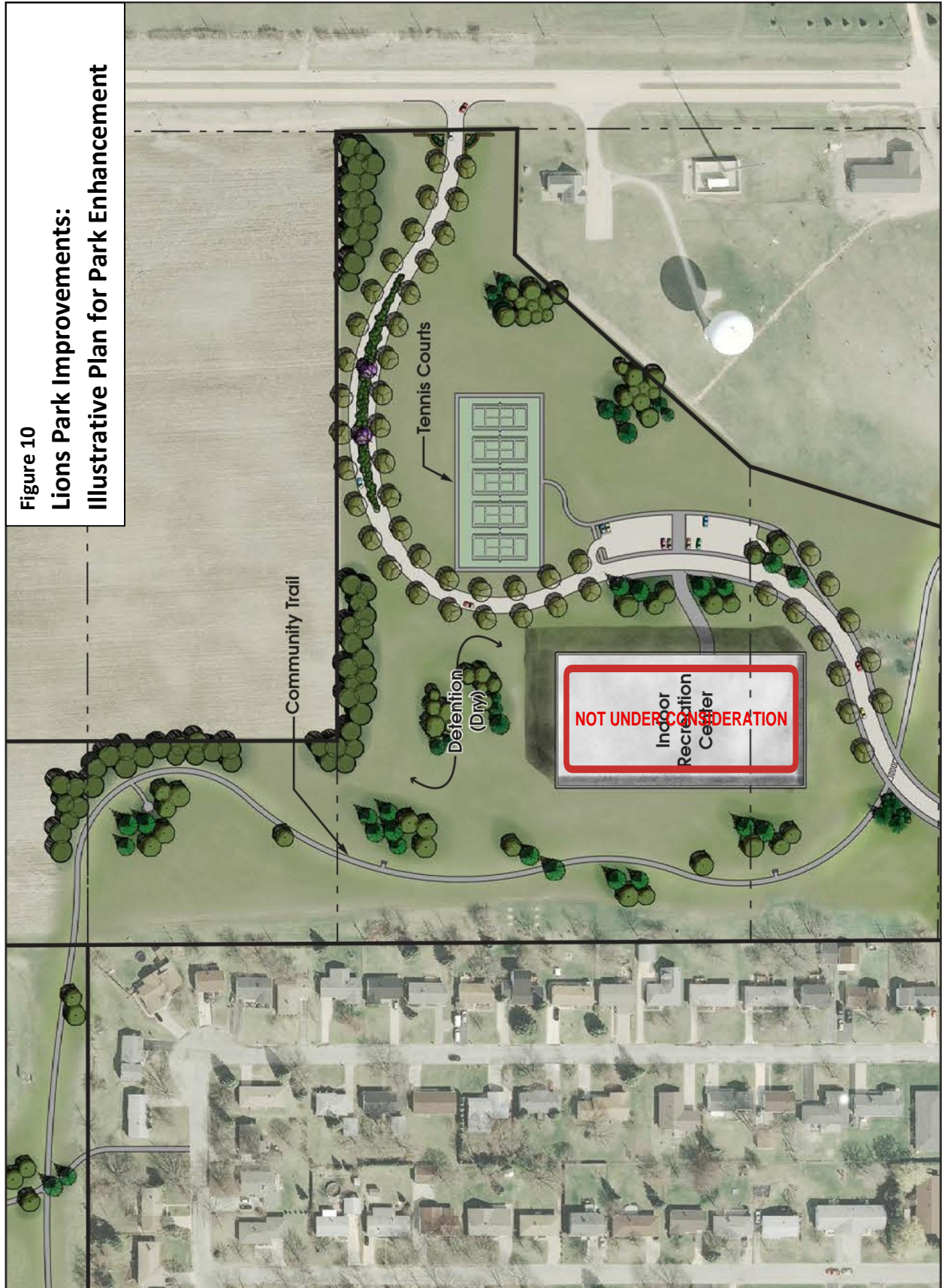
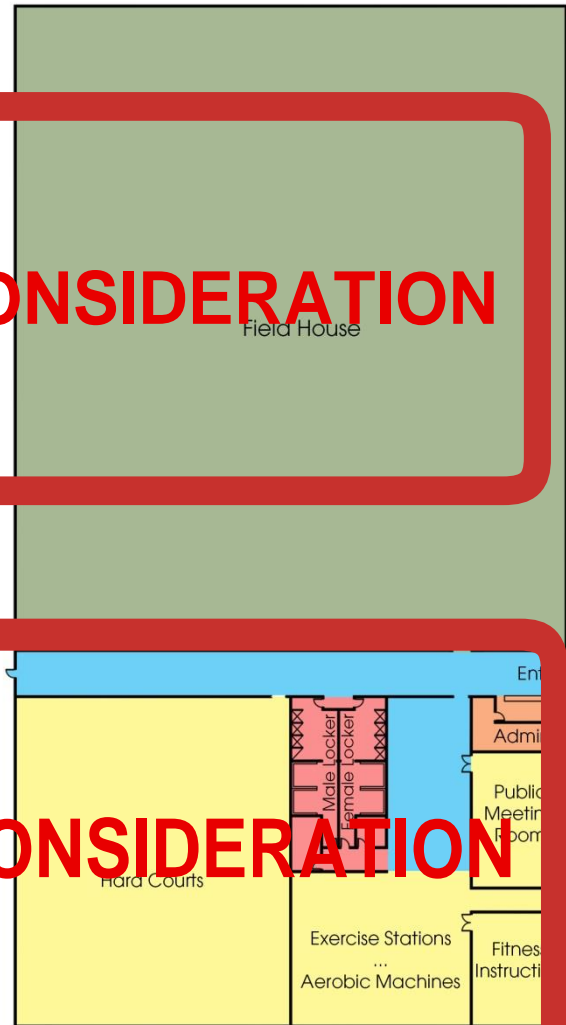


Figure 10
**Lions Park Improvements:
 Illustrative Plan for Park Enhancement**



- 4) **Indoor Recreation Center:** As discussed, a new indoor recreation center is not formally recommended due to budget limitations. Such a facility is highly desired within the community and development of such a center should be a longer term goal. If such a facility were to be built, its location in Lions Park would allow for joint use of the facility by the nearby schools and hospital. An alternate location in downtown Harvard might also be considered for the indoor recreation center. A hypothetical program is

illustrated in Figure 11, Recreation Center Floor Plan., which recommends those program elements that have the highest level of use at the lowest improvement cost, including: a) indoor sports field for baseball/softball, soccer and football; b) workout room; c) gymnasium for basketball, volleyball, and gymnastics; d) group exercise/Pilates room; and e) community meeting room. This program does not include every facility identified as desirable in public involvement events, but does reflect the “no-frills” sensibilities of the community. If a community center is built, it will likely have a program similar to the one shown on Figure 11.



Recreation Center Floor Plan

- 5) **Community-Wide Trail:** The Community-Wide Trail would traverse Lions Park from south to north, then extend westward to connect Lions Park to Harvard Junior High School, Harvard High School, and Jefferson Elementary School. Exercise stations could be located along the trail within the park to provide a full workout experience.
- 6) **Dog Park:** Dog parks are facilities with community-wide interest and belong in the larger system parks, Lions Park and Milky Way Park. The Dog Park shown on Figure 11 allocates space large enough to provide for key dog park amenities, including: a) full perimeter fencing; b) gate controlled ingress-egress; c) separate areas for large and small dogs; d) walking paths for dog owners; e) dog drinking fountains; and f) benches.



Small dog area of a dog park.

- 7) **New/Relocated Playground:** The existing playground is proposed for improvement relocation to the front and side of the Harvard Library rather than behind it.
- 8) **Enhanced Picnic Area:** The mature Oak grove in the park is a great location for the picnic area. This facility is proposed for improvement through the addition of built in barbeque grills, clusters of picnic benches for extended family gatherings, and horseshoe pits for complementary recreation/amusement.
- 9) **Sand Volleyball/Ice Rink:** This facility exists now and is proposed for minor improvement/enhancement and better maintenance.
- 10) **Multi-Use Lawn Area/Walking Track:** A defined space for lawn games and general recreation is proposed for the southern expansion area. This lawn area will be encircled by a 1/8 mile walking track. A flower garden is proposed in front of the lawn area along Galvin Parkway.
- 11) **Entry Feature:** A formal entry feature is proposed at the southern entrance to Lions Park at the intersection of Galvin Parkway and Diggins Street. This entry feature is intended to increase the visibility of the park, enhance its image and elevate its prominence.

3.6 Northfield Park Improvements

Northfield Park is the neighborhood park selected as the park represented system wide enhancement of neighborhood parks within the system. While the facilities at each neighborhood park must be determined based on the function of the park and existing amenities, neighborhood parks in general should support impromptu active and passive recreation through facilities such as: a) open lawn areas; b) active recreation facilities where appropriate; c) playgrounds; d) picnic/family gathering areas; and e) walking paths.

Figure 12, Northfield Park Improvements, illustrates how specific upgrades and new facilities might be arranged within the park. The scope of the improvements will fill significant recreational needs within the surrounding residential neighborhoods and make the park nicer, more attractive and more satisfying for park users. Specific improvements represented on Figure 12 include:

- 1) **New Basketball Courts:** The existing tennis courts are proposed for resurfacing and conversion to basketball courts. Basketball is a more accessible sport than tennis and more suitable for neighborhood park locations.
- 2) **Family Picnic Stations:** Three “family picnic stations” are proposed along the west side of the park, convenient to existing on-street parallel parking on 8th Street. These family picnic stations are designed to support extended family gatherings through clusters of picnic tables positioned around a built-in barbeque pit and tree plantings to separate the three stations from each other. Horseshoe pits are located across the trail from the station to provide complementary social recreation.



A simple built-in barbeque pit for a park
City of Harvard, IL,
Park System Master Plan

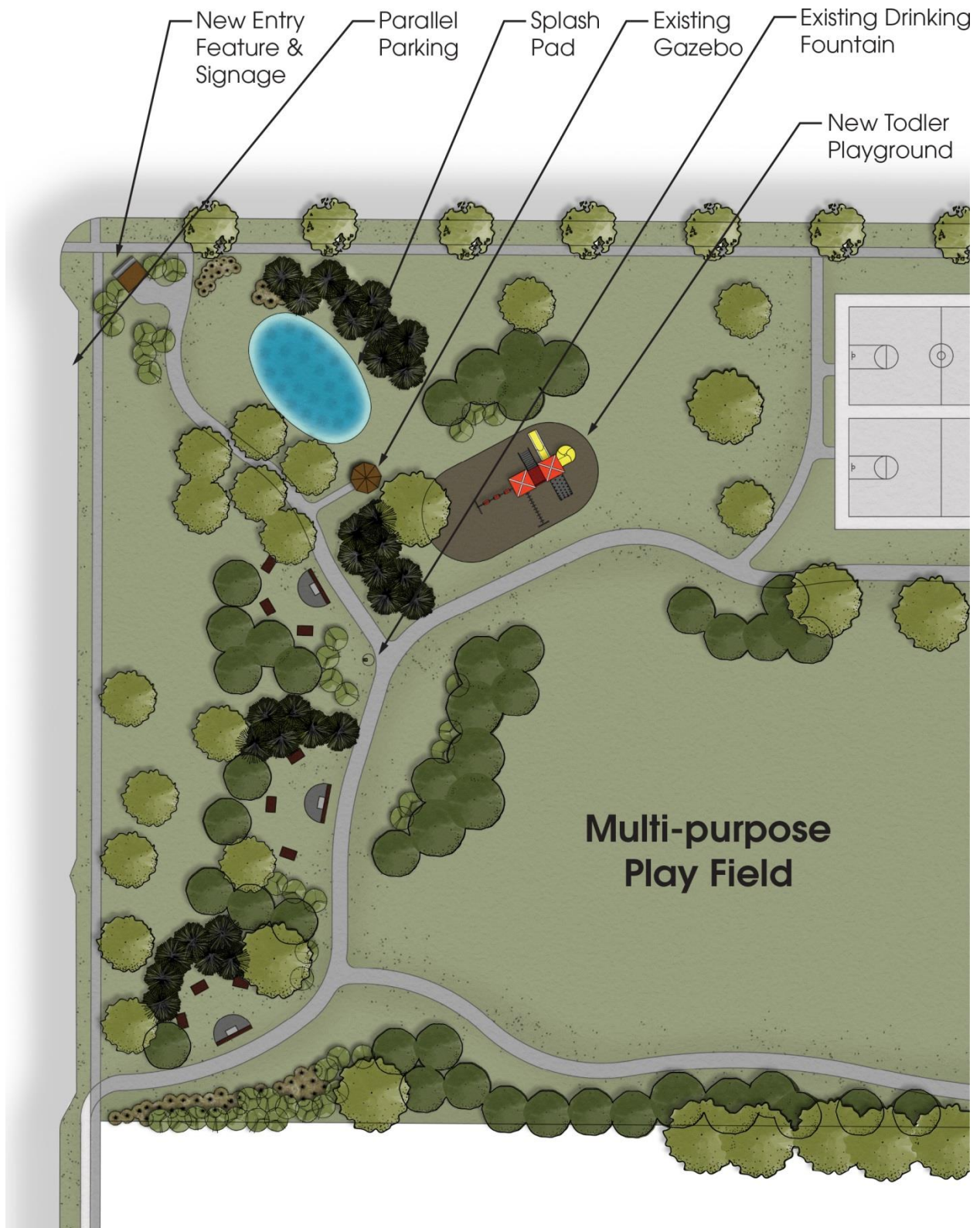
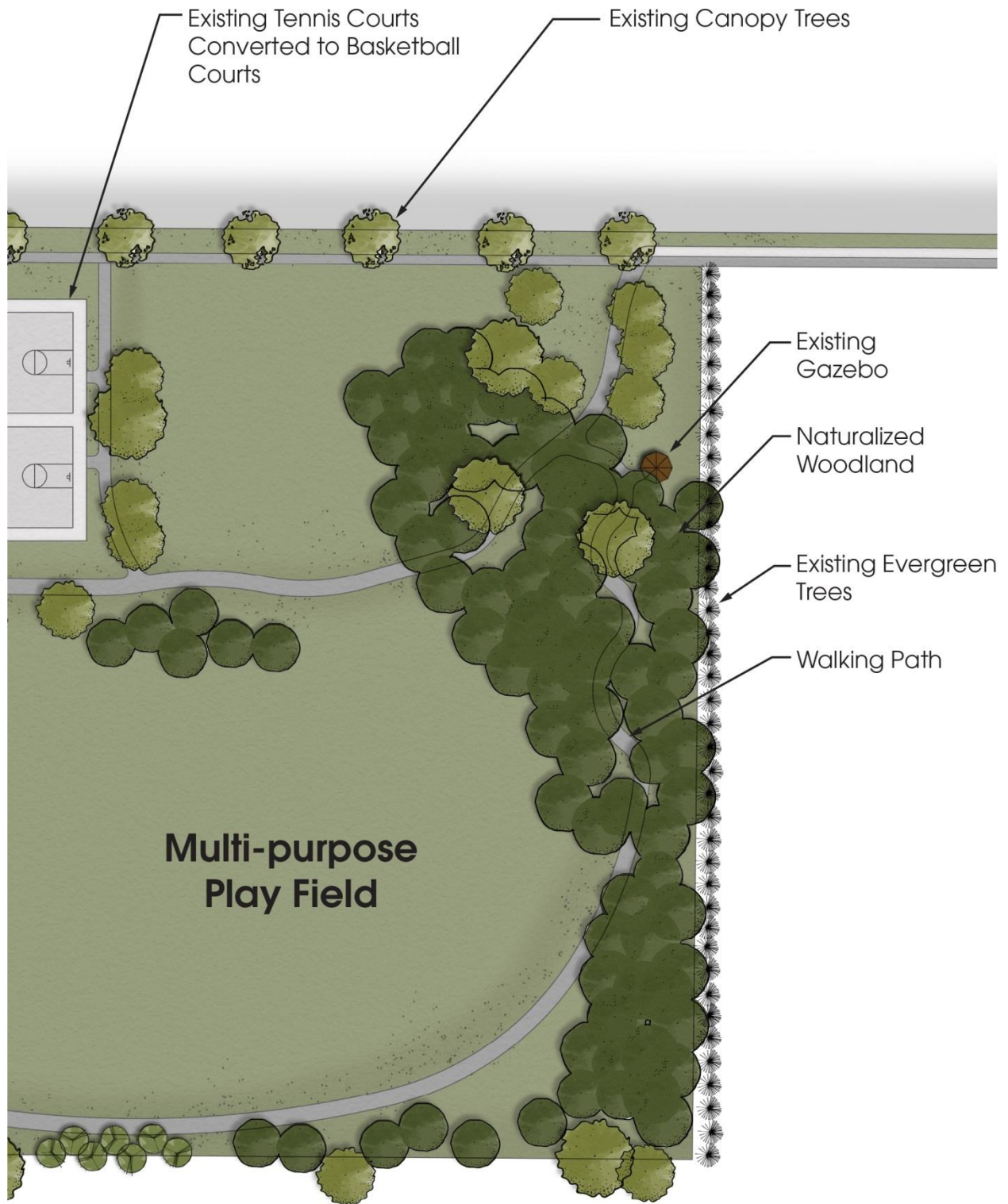


Figure 12
Northfield Park Improvements:
Illustrative Plan for Park Enhancement



- 3) **Splash Pad:** A new feature proposed for Northfield Park is a *splash pad*, which consists of various water sprays on a hard surface floor with good traction when wet. Splash pads can be simple or elaborate, with both types providing simple water recreation for kids in the summer months.



A splash pad designed for smaller children



A splash pad designed for older children

- 4) **New Playground:** A new, larger playground is proposed within the park, located in a slightly more central location. The existing playground equipment is in relatively good condition and could be incorporated into the new playground. A durable, shock absorbent surface is needed suitable for various weather conditions.



Existing playground.

- 5) **Naturalized Woodland:** Natural features are not well represented in Harvard's parks. Small areas of natural features, such as woods, ponds, rock outcrops and other elements are attractive amenities in parks. Figure 12 recommends a massing of deciduous trees along the eastern side of the park to help frame the park and provide a small natural woodland. A walking path would pass through the woodland and connect with the community-wide trail in the southwest corner of the park. The small naturalized woodland would provide habitat to birds and small wildlife, which will add interest to the park.



Walking path through woodland in park.

- 6) **Multi-Purpose Play Field:** The park currently has a generous open play field area. The addition of tree masses to frame the field and the walking path along the southern edge will better define the field and make it more attractive to use. The addition of new facilities to the park will bring more users in general, some of whom will use the multi-purpose play field.

- 7) **Enhanced Entry Features.** Attractive signage and entrances to parks make them more inviting and also enhance the image of the surrounding neighborhoods. The main entry feature for Northfield Park will be at the corner of 8th Street and Northfield Avenue, with secondary entrance features at the northeast and southeast corners of the park.



Example of an attractive park entry feature

3.7 Park System Summary

The Park System Master Plan described in Chapter 3 of this report illustrates a park system that is significantly upgraded from its current condition, while also practical and achievable for the City of Harvard. The recommendations for physical improvements are calibrated to a realistic increased annual park budget. Importantly, the Framework Budget outlined in Table 1 allocated funds for the improvements/upgrades specifically identified in the comments received from the various forms of public involvement, including: 1) improved maintenance; 2) more facilities/activities in the parks; 3) improved park aesthetics; 4) modernizing the park system; and 5) supporting the youth sport activities and organizations.

The Park System Master Plan does not include an indoor recreation center, although such a facility is shown in Figure 10, Lions Park Improvements. The cost of such a facility exceeds that which could be realistically expected to be raised based on current budget conditions. This does not mean, however, that goal of building an indoor recreation center should be abandoned. Rather, this Plan recommends that the City, the youth sports organizations and the Harvard Parks Foundation explore alternatives for securing the funds needed for the indoor recreation center through increased tax revenue, grants, cost sharing with the schools and hospital, and private fundraising. Once the feasibility of building the indoor recreation center is raised, a separate study should be undertaken to define programming needs for the facility.

Chapter 4: Plan Implementation

4.1 The Implementation Process

Implementation of any plan is a process that must be customized for each individual circumstance. The implementation program must be tailored to respond to the variables of **funding**, **capacity**, and **public support**. How these variables take shape relative to implementing the Harvard Park System Master Plan is discussed below.

Funding: This is one of the critical issues facing implementation. Under current budget conditions, there is no source of funding for the park system improvements called for in this Plan. As discussed, a new property tax surcharge dedicated to park system funding would need to be approved by the voters in order to make improvements. A new property tax surcharge is needed because the City's revenue barely covers current expenses. Future City revenue growth is unlikely because growth in new development is unlikely and the City is limited in raising its tax levy by State law. The most logical form of property tax surcharge to fund the parks is a continuation of the current property tax surcharge in place to pay the bonds let to fund the Harvard Pool, which will be paid off in approximately two years. Voters would need to approve a continuation of this levy amount to be directed toward a new purpose, funding park system improvements. Ideally, a vote on continuing the levy would take place within the next 18 months so that the levy will continue without an interruption.

Capacity: The park system operates as a department of City government and City staff will need to formulate a program for park system improvement and manage that program. The City has a small staff but has proven itself capable of managing improvement programs. Three options exist for how the park improvement program is managed: 1) within the Parks and Recreation Department; 2) the Public Works Department; and 3) the City Administrator's office. There is not currently surplus capacity in any of these departments and it is unlikely the City would want to add an employee for purpose of managing park improvements. It may be that managing the park improvement program through the City Administrator's office, with consultant assistance, is the best option.

Public Support: Public support can never be taken for granted. Throughout this planning process, public comments received indicated strong public support for park system improvement. During the Visioning Workshop, the City's budget limitations were discussed and it was understood and accepted that voter approval for funding of park system improvements was needed. How voters will respond to an actual ballot measure for a property tax surcharge to fund park improvements remains to be seen, although there is reason to think it would pass because: a) Harvard tax payers presently pay very little toward the park system; b) residents recognize that the current park system does not meet their needs, and 3) a continuation of the current Harvard Pool tax levy can be framed not as a tax increase, but the continuation of the current levy for another form of recreation improvement.

Public support of the property tax surcharge needed to fund park improvements may be the most important aspect of public support, but not the only one. There must be public support for the improvements actually made. Typically, different segments of the population favor different types of improvements. This is to be expected. Absolute unanimity is impossible. The goal should be clear public consensus for the program in general, with components in the program to appeal to all segments of the population.

While challenges exist in all three components, Harvard can find a path toward successful implementation of the improvements recommended in this Park System Master Plan. Funding improvements to the park system is in the hands of the voters, but strong rationale exists for approving a property tax surcharge to fund upgrading the system. Harvard's capacity is managing both physical improvements additional recreation programming is limited, but the scale of the system upgrade is within the City's capacity to manage. There appears to be a good level of public support for upgrading the park system. The outcome of the referendum will reflect the voter's desire for park system improvement, but will also require confidence in the City to carry out the improvements.

4.2 Strategic Approach to Implementation

Harvard should view the implementation process through a strategic lens. The City has not placed sufficient emphasis on the park system in the past and needs a strategic approach to address this need. Providing a park system that meets the needs of the community is responsibility the City should seek to fulfill. However, the City is faced with a dilemma; the only way it can improve the park system is by increasing taxes and voters may perceive the referendum on a tax increase is for the City's benefit.

Proposals to increase taxes to fund government services typically meet with some degree of skepticism, and the City needs to present the case for the property tax surcharge very clearly. The case should not be one in which the City is asking for more taxes to operate local government. Rather, the voters have a choice on whether to fund park system improvement, or not. The City can and should be an advocate, but an advocate for a better park system, with the property tax surcharge being the means of achieving the upgrade. The City's approach to implementation should focus on how to advance a positive outcome on the referendum. Modest, but meaningful, achievement in better cooperation between stakeholders can and should be realized. Some improvement in maintenance may also be possible. However, plans for actual implementation of park system improvements cannot be made until after the voters have approved the referendum.

4.3 Implementation Action Agenda

The key tool of this Plan to advance implementation of the park system is presented in Table 3, Harvard Park System Improvement Action Agenda. This document outlines six key initiatives focused on promoting a positive outcome of the voter referendum on funding park system improvements. The outcome of the voter referendum is the pivotal event that will shape the condition of Harvard's park system for years to come. It is critical that the City carry out the actions needed to present the case for the referendum to the voters, and demonstrate that the City can effectively implement significant park system improvements. These six initiatives are:

TABLE 3:**HARVARD PARK SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT ACTION AGENDA, Page One**

Initiative #1:	Benefits/Outcomes	
Advance Voter Referendum	a) Determines if long-term funding for the park system is forthcoming b) If approved, allows City to proceed to implement system improvements	
Actions	Carried Out By	Timing
1) Determine technical requirements	City Staff	February 2016
2) Conduct public awareness program & gain input	City Staff, City Council, Youth Sports Organizations & Harvard Parks Foundation	March 2016 – September 2016
3) Fulfill Technical Requirements	City Staff & Election Officials	January 2017
4) Administer Referendum	Election Officials	April 2017
Funding:	Order of Magnitude Cost: Low	Source: General City Fund

Initiative #2:	Benefits/Outcomes	
Improve Coordination among Recreation Stakeholders	a) Establishes clear lines of responsibility for park maintenance and activity coordination. b) Promotes better maintenance of key parks. c) Achieves higher level of satisfaction among users. d) Achieves more efficient use of financial resources through coordination and sharing. e) Reduces levels of frustration f) Builds positive track record for volunteerism in the park system	
Actions	Carried Out By	Timing
1) Prepare conceptual framework	Camios as part of Park System Master Plan	Completed
2) Test review of conceptual framework by Boys League	Performed as part of Park System Master Plan	Completed
3) Preliminary review by all Youth Sports Organizations & Meeting	City Staff, Youth Sports Organizations and Camios	Mid-January, 2016
4) Present to School District 50 Officials and discuss	City Staff, Youth Sports Organizations and School District	Mid-February, 2016
5) Revisions to Framework Agreement and Approval	City Staff, Youth Sports Organizations and School District	Mid-March, 2016
6) Draft agreements between stakeholders for 2016 Season	Respective stakeholders or Camios	Mid-April, 2016
Funding:	Order of Magnitude Cost: Low	Source: To be Determined

TABLE 3:**HARVARD PARK SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT ACTION AGENDA, Page Two**

Initiative #3:	Benefits/Outcomes	
Create City Management Structure for Park Improvement Program	a) Establishes management structure to manage construction of park improvements and expanded recreational programming. b) Demonstrates to public in advance of referendum that the City is organized to implement park system improvements should the voters approve the referendum.	
Actions	Carried Out By	Timing
1) City Administrator to assess management options and makes report to City Council. Report put on City website.	City Administrator	March 2016
2) City Council reviews report, discusses, and receives public comment.	City Council; general public	April 2016
3) City Council passes resolution on management structure for implementing park improvement program.	City Council	June 2016
Funding:	Order of Magnitude Cost: Low	Source: General City Fund

Initiative #4:	Benefits/Outcomes	
Design Expanded Recreation Activity Program	a) Requires staff to plan how to use the additional activity programming dollars in the Budget Framework. b) Involves public outreach on what activities are desired. c) Applies Cooperation Agreement to broaden the range of activities possible and potential venues. d) Indirectly builds support for referendum.	
Actions	Carried Out By	Timing
1) Assess Budget Framework and expanded programming funds	City Parks and Recreation Department staff and City Administrator	May 2016
2) Prepare memorandum on preliminary ideas for expanded recreation programming. Post on City website.	City Parks and Recreation Department staff	June 2016
3) Consideration and discussion; Harvard Parks Committee and general public	Harvard Parks Committee; general public and City Parks and Recreation Department staff	July 2016
4) Revise post final Expanded Recreation Activity Program	City Parks and Recreation Department staff and City Administrator	August 2016
Funding:	Order of Magnitude Cost: Low/Moderate	Source: Current Dept. Budget

TABLE 3:
HARVARD PARK SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT ACTION AGENDA, Page Three

Initiative #5:	Benefits/Outcomes	
Develop Preliminary Park Improvement Construction Budget	a) Provides reality check to capital improvement component of the Budget Framework (\$800,000). b) Demonstrates to voters the level of physical improvement to be realized is the referendum is approved. c) Builds City's credibility for carrying out the improvement program.	
Actions	Carried Out By	Timing
1) Reassess key assumptions in the Budget Framework.	City Staff & Consultant	March 2016
2) Assess priorities for improvements to each park	City Staff & Consultant	April 2016
3) Assess specific park improvements and level of quality; estimate construction costs	City Staff & Consultant	June 2016
4) Prepare memo on recommend-ded park improvements for construction pending outcome on referendum for review by Parks Committee	City Staff, Consultant, Harvard Parks Committee and the general public	August 2016
Funding:	Order of Magnitude Cost: Low	Source: City General Fund

Initiative #6:	Benefits/Outcomes	
Advance the Harvard Parks Foundation	a) Helps key recreation stakeholder get up and running. b) Enhances potential for grant funding to supplement City funds. c) Builds additional source of capacity to improve parks.	
Actions	Carried Out By	Timing
1) Research roles & actions of similar organizations in other cities	Harvard Parks Foundation and City staff	March 2016
2) Identify projects and initiatives	Harvard Parks Foundation and City staff	April 2016
3) Identify grant writing resources	Harvard Parks Foundation and City staff	May 2016
4) The Harvard Parks Foundation mission should include harnessing the Harvard's strong sense of volunteerism	Harvard Parks Foundation and City staff	May 2016
5) Prepare three year strategic plan for Harvard Parks Foundation	Harvard Parks Foundation and City staff	July 2016
Funding:	Order of Magnitude Cost: Low	Source: Assignment of staff time

1. **Advance Voter Referendum:** demonstrate the City is prepared to improve the park system if the voters approve it, and fulfill legal requirements put it on the ballot.
2. **Improve Coordination among Recreation Stakeholders:** work to establish agreements between the City, the youth sports organizations and School District 50 on cooperation on use of facilities, maintenance and scheduling.
3. **Create City Management Structure for the Park Improvement Program:** determine how the City will manage the park improvement program.
4. **Design Expanded Recreation Activity Program:** formulate a proposal for additional recreation activities/programs should the referendum pass.
5. **Develop Preliminary Park Improvement Construction Budget:** prepare a preliminary program of improvements for each park and a construction budget for these improvements.
6. **Advance the Harvard Parks Foundation:** provide technical assistance in refining its mission, developing a short term program and applying for grants.

The six initiatives presented in the Harvard Park System Improvement Action Agenda are the strategically important actions the City, and other stakeholders, need to complete over the next eighteen months. The City, as the stakeholder with primary responsibility for improving the park system, must take the lead. The City should begin laying the groundwork for improving the park system in advance of voter approval of the special funding needed for system improvement. Undertaking this advance work is not a presumption that voters will approve special funding, but merely putting “flesh on the bones” of the improvement program so that voters can better see what they will get for their additional taxes.

4.4 Implementation Summary

This Plan presents clear guidance on implementing the recommendations for significant improvement of Harvard’s park system. This guidance includes an Action Agenda comprised of six initiatives designed to prepare the City, other stakeholders, and the community at large for the pivotal step of a referendum on a special tax surcharge to fund park system improvement. The implementation horizon can extend no further than this pivotal step, because the agenda for parks system improvement will be determined by the voter’s response to the referendum.

With this backdrop, the prospects for improving the Harvard park system look bright. Reasons for optimism include:

1. The park system is in obvious need of improvement.
2. Public input received to date indicates strong support of improvement.
3. Extending the current Harvard Pool levy can be viewed as continuing a current tax.
4. The addition of \$150,000 in annual revenue would support major improvements to the Harvard park system.

The City of Harvard needs to demonstrate its capacity, commitment and preparedness for park system improvement and the prospects for success system improvement are bright.