

Executive Summary

Note: All proposed Parks, Trails, and Facilities within this document are conceptual in nature and not accessible for public use. Locations may change based upon opportunities/constraints at the time of development. The conceptual locations should be considered tentative placeholders within each Service Area.

Laramie, which is located in Albany County at an elevation of 7,200 feet and home to the State's only four-year higher-education institution, the University of Wyoming, is a quintessential western community blended with a progressive and modern outlook. With a population of 30,816 people, Laramie is expected to grow by approximately 10,000 people by 2050, bringing Laramie's total population to 40,000. When examining the community more closely, a younger population, over half of the total, is between the ages of 15-34 years old with denser populations of people living around or in close proximity to the University of Wyoming campus.

The City of Laramie has a solid and rooted history in parks, recreation, trails and natural areas. With the creation of Undine Park in the 1880's, the Laramie River Greenbelt corridor, and the recent Laramie Community Recreation Center, it is clear that the City and community have committed to parks, recreation, trails and natural areas as a high priority. The rich history of Laramie's parks and recreation system demonstrates this commitment, further solidifying the importance of this Plan for Laramie. A more detailed history is provided in Chapter 3

The Vision

The Parks and Recreation Master Plan has been developed in order to achieve Laramie's vision for Parks and Recreation in the community. Based on the public comments, background information, other plans/codes and the Ad Hoc Advisory Committee's experience and expertise, the Ad Hoc Advisory Committee developed a vision for the Plan. The vision is intended to provide the inspiration and framework for the Plan, which includes generalized goals and direction. The following vision was approved by the Ad Hoc Advisory Committee:

1. Provide equitable parks and recreation services and opportunities to all areas and people of the community.
2. Develop a parks, trails, recreation and natural areas system that is specific to Laramie and the surrounding community.
3. Establish new parks in conjunction with proposed development or in areas of park deficiency; parks should be considered no different than other vital infrastructure, such as streets, sidewalks and utilities.
4. Improve the visual appearance of our community through beautification of City owned areas by improving their recreational and natural area qualities.
5. Provide for the future needs of the community in relation to parks, recreation, trails and natural areas through sound planning and visionary foresight.

6. Establish a funding mechanism that provides for parks, recreation, trails and natural areas that adequately serves the population, based on population growth and development pressures.
7. Provide for a continuous mobility loop around (and throughout) the community for off-street bike and pedestrian paths that allow users to access parks, recreation and natural areas.
8. Secure permanent access east of the City to ensure preservation of the natural areas, and at a minimum access to the National Forest.

With the City of Laramie's **Parks and Recreation Master Plan** being developed from a community vision that believed Parks, Recreation, Trails and Natural Areas components of our community are important and require the long range planning vision that only a comprehensive plan could provide. For many communities, parks, recreation, trails and natural areas are an afterthought; Laramie is not one of those communities and does not want to be one of those communities. With the development of the **1982 Parks Master Plan** and many of the plans that followed it, one common theme was present: parks, recreation, trails and natural areas are the number one priority for community residents. This Plan is necessary for the community and its leaders to work towards achieving the high expectations, visions, goals and standards established and outlined by the community through this process.

Although a community's desire may differ as to why a plan should be developed, all well-developed plans have inherent benefits to the community. The most apparent benefit a parks master plan can provide is the long term, community-wide planning needed to provide facilities for the entire community in relation to parks and recreation.

Aside from good general planning practice, one of the specific benefits of a plan is to help aid in budgeting. In any budgeting situation, especially in a government setting, short term budgeting often leads to inefficient expenditures. Albany County and Laramie do not receive large revenues from the State or other sources such as mining, thus development of these facilities must come from the general budget, typically over a longer period of time. Although the community has traditionally shown a commitment to these facilities, Laramie is not alone in feeling the difficulties of budget cuts. Long term planning make this Plan an essential component of good stewardship. Managing the year-to-year budget keeps the long term vision within grasp. This long term approach also allows for small budget increases over a series of years to accomplish and implement objectives identified in the Plan, instead of one-time, large increases that are difficult to obtain.

Across the country, parks and recreation amenities are now considered essential services to cities, and in fact, act as an economic generator to the community by increasing property values, aiding in business retention and attracting new business to the community. These quality of life improvements create a sense of place, preserve the environment and generate tourism dollars. No matter the reason, parks and recreation facilities provide widespread benefits to the community, making this Plan even more important not only for the development of parks and recreation in Laramie but also for the general betterment of the community.

Wyoming Statutes gives the City the authority to make plans for the physical development of the City, including Parks, Recreation, Trails and Natural Areas. Two distinct areas are addressed by this Plan;

areas inside City Limits and areas outside City Limits but within the one mile boundary. For areas inside City Limits the full applicability and enforceability of the Plan apply. It is important to note that elements of the Plan outside City limits are limited in applicability and enforceability. However, long range planning for the Laramie community remains of paramount importance; particularly as the City continues to grow by likely annexing new areas into the City. Once annexed, these areas will fall under the jurisdiction of the City and this Plan.

For this Plan, public participation was expected and was the driving force behind the development of the document. Opportunities for the public to participate included public meetings, stakeholder groups, a community survey, as well as unsolicited phone conversations and letters to the City, just to name a few. Public meetings like the bi-weekly Ad Hoc Advisory Committee, Planning Commission and City Council, plus many other board and commission meetings were opportunities for these boards and the public to comment and provide input on the Plan. Additionally, a more focused approach was taken to collect public comments through stakeholder groups. These stakeholder meetings provided a focused look at specific issues related to specific interests and goals of each stakeholder group in relation to Parks, Recreation, Trails and Natural Areas.

Another major public participation initiative was a community wide survey (Laramie residents and County residents within the one-mile boundary) completed by Wyoming Survey and Analysis Center (WYSAC). The survey was developed by City of Laramie Staff, the Ad Hoc Advisory Committee and WYSAC personnel to assess preferences and attitudes about various Parks and Recreation related issues. The high response rate was invaluable in surveying the public's opinion on these matters. Finally, less formal and more modern methods such as a web site for the Plan's development, newspaper ads, Facebook and Twitter were used to disseminate information such as meeting times, agendas and general information, providing an opportunity to comment through mail, phone or email and complete a survey if they were not mailed one. (See Appendix B, C and D for more information)

Updates and amendments to the Plan are essential to keeping a plan relevant to the desires of a community. Every five years minor updates should be completed such as; general editing and map updates to reflect completed improvements, updates to goals and action statements. Other changes may reflect new codes or regulations which change how the Plan is used. Every ten years major updates should be implemented including; new Park plans or updates to the existing plans, revision of goals, updates to public comments/issues, Service Area modifications, updates to action statements as well as any other necessary updates. All updates shall follow the process as established by State Statutes and Laramie Municipal Code for updates to a Master Plan.

The goals and recommendations for Parks, Recreation, Trails and Natural Areas have been outlined in many previous plans adopted by Laramie and its surrounding communities over the years. Because of the direction provided in these plans, City Staff, the Ad Hoc Committee and the public looked to these recommendations for providing direction related to the development of this Plan. This Plan considered the following documents; Laramie Bikeway Study, Comprehensive Plan: Parks, Recreation, and Open Space, Land Use Element, Laramie Bicycle Facility Master Plan, Laramie Comprehensive Plan, Casper Aquifer Protection Plan & Ordinance, Albany County Comprehensive Plan, Unified Development Code,

University of Wyoming Long Range Development Plan, A Downtown Development Plan for Laramie Wyoming, Management Plan for Water Rights on the Monolith Ranch & Monolith Ranch Agricultural Management Plan, Medicine Bow National Forest Revised Land and Resource Management Plan, Wyoming Statewide Comprehensive Recreation Plan and Cirrus Sky Technology Park Master Plan. More information related to these plans can be found in Chapter 2.

Parks and Recreation Standards

A successful Parks and Recreation Master Plan requires a set of classifications and standards that provide a framework for the physical development and redevelopment of any community facility. Not only do these standards set an expected baseline for a community's size, type, location and amenities of its parks and recreation facilities, it establishes a community wide standard that can be used by the City, more specifically, the Parks and Recreation Department. The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) published the Recreation, Park, and Open Space Standards and Guidelines (2009) to establish nationally applicable criteria for the provision of natural areas, parks and recreation facilities. These standards serve as a guide for parks and recreation planning and this Plan, but do not replace reasonable judgment or specific local needs. The National Standards have been modified to specifically fit Laramie's needs and unique characteristics. For this Plan, four main groups of standards were generated; Parks, Trails, Recreation and Natural Areas.

For Parks, standards were developed that provide guidance related to the size, services, location and amenities that should be standard in each of the three main park types: Community, Neighborhood and Playlot Parks.

Recreation facilities and amenities standards were also developed that provided specifics for each of the facilities of note, but lacked the general standards like those developed for the parks, due to the specifics needed for each. Standards for the Recreation Center, Ice and Events Center, sports complexes, dog friendly off-leash areas, splash parks, playgrounds, skate-park, cemetery and Jacoby Golf Course were developed that provided background, location, size, funding and future issues.

Standards for Natural Resource Areas were also developed, which provide direction to the community in relationship to areas that are set aside for preservation of significant natural resources, open space, unique topography, visual aesthetics, access to other natural resources areas (State Lands, National Forest, etc.) or some other resource that has been determined of value to the community. Two different types of Natural Areas were standardized; Open Space and Preserve. Open Space allows different levels of improvements and access, while Preserves limit or restrict improvements as well as the access to the areas. Proposed standards are provided in relationship to private versus public Natural Areas.

Trail standards were also developed for four main types; Bicycle Lanes, Shared-Use Paths, Rural Trails and Other. Generally, all bicycle lanes, shared-use paths and any other pedestrian routes noted in this Plan or constructed in Laramie should conform to the **Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) 2009**, as well as other standards such as **Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities 2012**, **Americans with Disabilities Act 1990 (as amended)** and **City of Laramie Engineering Standards**. In

addition to the general standards outlined in these documents, detailed standards such as location, width and painting/signage needs, as well as many other standards are addressed in Chapter 4.

In addition to some of the more commonly associated parks and recreation amenities, other standards were developed for; Recreation and Programming, Laramie Beautification Areas, University of Wyoming campus and Detention Areas. Standards varied between the different amenities and were tailored to meet the needs of each amenity and the community. Standards that were developed ranged from: how to accommodate different user groups, such as youth or seniors in recreation programming, how to improve gateways into the community through beautification areas and maximizing the potential of a Detention Area not only for stormwater management but also for recreation and beautification.

Parks and Recreation Analysis

With the importance of Parks and Recreation planning, developing standards for amenities, and programming and other key areas of this Plan, the final component of this Plan is the physical planning of the community. The physical development of the community was presented in two different ways; by Service Area and by each existing Park or major Facility. As noted above and throughout the Plan, the community was divided into Service Area, which are based on area geography, major barriers to travel and other physical features. By dividing up the community in this manner, a more manageable approach to providing parks and recreation services for delineated areas of the community could be undertaken. Based on each Service Area, existing and future population was analyzed. Based on this analysis, the number, acreage and spatial needs for the SA in relationship to Parks (Community, Neighborhood and Playlot Parks) was given. Finally, a detailed analysis, goals and summary for each Service Area are then provided showing how the SA is currently serving the SA's needs and what is desirable for the future.

In addition to the analysis provided for each Service Area, each existing Park and major facility was also examined. Each analysis provided details related to existing and proposed needs for each park or facility. For many of the parks, existing amenities and future needs were similar, especially for parks in similar categories such as Community, Neighborhood or Playlot Parks. However, depending upon the size, population, location, and existing amenities, among other factors, the needs for each park varied. For instance, additional dog friendly off-leash parks, sand volleyball courts or a BMX/Cyclo-cross course were all desired amenities by the public, however, every park does not need all of these amenities. Based on public comment and input from the Ad Hoc Committee and Staff, amenities were distributed throughout these parks to accommodate needs of the area or community as a whole.

Similar to the study completed for each park, an analysis related to major facilities, such as the Recreation Center, Ice and Events Center and Cemetery, among others, was also completed. For the analysis completed for each of these facilities, the needs varied. For some facilities, future expansion, additional amenities and improvements were the common needs and desires, while other facilities such as the Cemetery, identified the need for a completely new site, due to the limited capacity of the existing facility.

This analysis is important in providing the community, Staff and elected officials a plan as to how these facilities will need to develop in the future. As stated in the vision and throughout the Plan, the Parks and Recreation Plan for the City is considered highly important to the community. Parks and Recreation amenities, Natural Areas, and Trails should no longer be considered secondary needs in Laramie, but instead should be considered a high priority within the goals of our community. Not only do these proposed features provide common benefits to a community such as places to play and recreate, but also benefit the community in other countless ways including the economy. This Plan is a well thought out and all encompassing representation of what the Laramie community desires in relationship to Parks, Recreation, Trails and Natural Areas.

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