

# Community Driven Master Plan Process Honors Legacy of Parks and Points to a Sustainable Future



**HONOR AWARD**

**Community Driven Master Plan Process Honors  
Legacy**

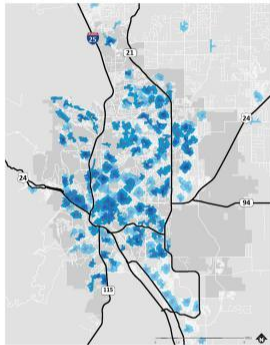
# of Parks and Points to a Sustainable Future

**By: Chris Lieber, Park Planning and Development Manager**

When General William Jackson Palmer established the City of Colorado Springs in 1871, his vision included an interconnected park system that over the next few decades would include iconic and beloved parks such as Garden of the Gods, North Cheyenne Canyon, and Pikes Peak America's Mountain. The Great Recession drove drastic budget cuts in 2010 within the City of Colorado Springs, hitting the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Department especially hard. The City's park system made national news as trash cans were removed, restrooms locked, lights turned off, irrigation systems shut down, and park employees laid off. These austere measures resulted in a community outcry and questions about the future quality of life in Colorado Springs. As the local economy slowly began to rebound, it was evident that the challenges of the recession provided unique opportunities to engage the community in a restorative master plan process, to address current issues and plot a course for a sustainable future.

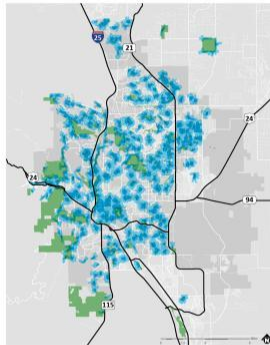
## EVALUATING ACCESS TO PARKS

Households with walking distance of Playgrounds



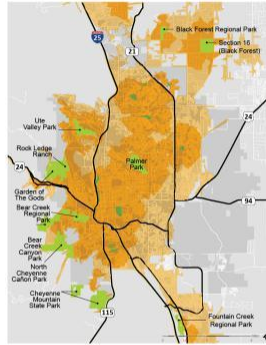
**7.4%** 1/4 mile  
**25.6%** 1/2 mile

Households within walking distance of Public Parks



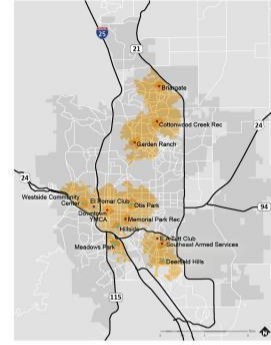
**21%** 1/4 mile  
**53%** 1/2 mile

Household with a reasonable bike or drive from Community & Regional Parks



**57%** 2 miles  
**91%** 5 miles

Household with a reasonable bike or drive from Recreation and Community Centers



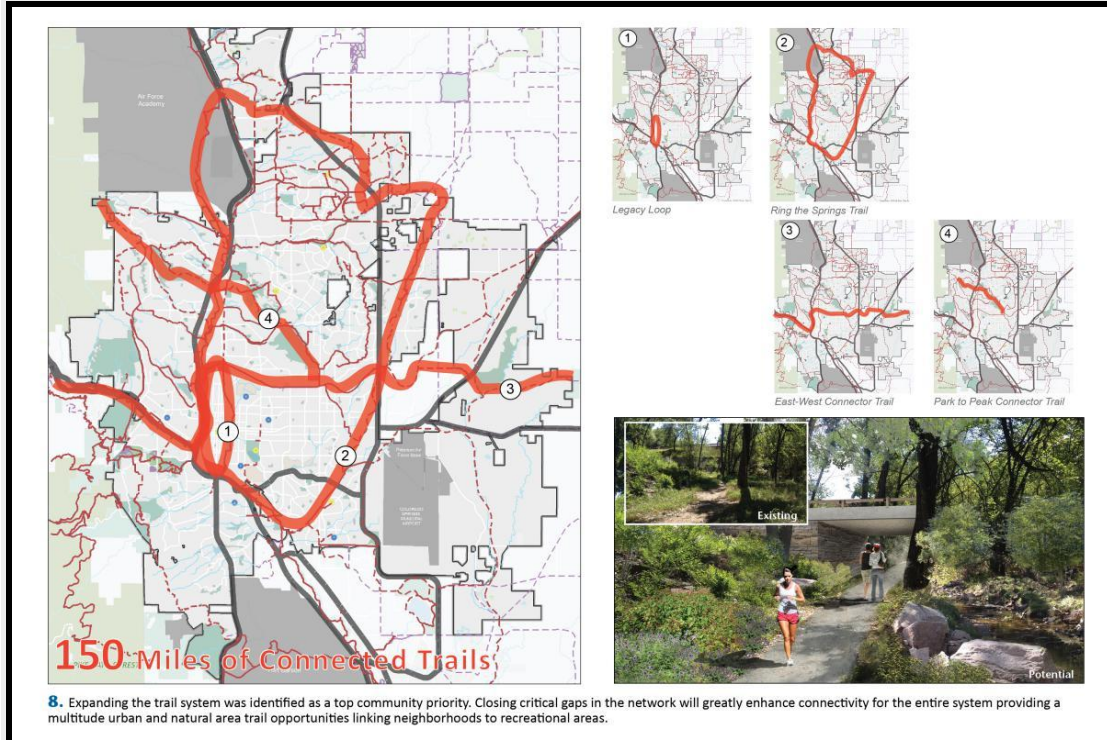
**3.7%** 1/2 mile  
**33.6%** 2 miles

### How far are you willing to walk?

Research shows that most people are comfortable walking a half-mile distance to reach a destination like a park or open space site. Meanwhile, a quarter-mile distance is a reasonable walk for families with young children or older adults.

**3.** The park distribution analysis evaluated the accessibility of parks and open space, accounting for the existing transportation network and significant barriers such as major highways. This study informed where to target future parks and recreation opportunities for equitable geographic distribution.

In 2014 the City engaged a team of consultants, led by the nationally recognized landscape architecture and planning firm, Design Workshop, to lead a community engagement process and develop a Park System Master Plan. Many months were spent analyzing the park system with an emphasis on operations, revenue streams and expenses. The evaluation included geographic analysis of parkland distribution, demographic concentration and facility service areas. A statistically valid survey identified City-wide park issues as well as unique needs within each quadrant of the City. The result was a thorough understanding of issues and opportunities to be addressed. Stakeholder meetings, focus groups, and public meetings were used to identify community needs, weigh alternatives and inform the final plan recommendations. After an 18 month process, the Park System Master Plan was unanimously accepted by the Colorado Springs City Council and embraced by the community to advance the legacy of General Palmer into the future.



The Parks

System Master Plan has already proven a success on many levels. The City is now reinvesting in its park system in partnership with the private sector to advance changing and emerging demographics with a new state of the art Pickleball Complex. Efforts are underway to complete the Legacy Loop and a greenway system around downtown Colorado Springs to improve connectivity which will enhance alternative transportation options and serve as a catalyst for economic development. The City is now building its first community park in over two decades to meet the recreation needs of a growing population. The environmentally friendly and economically sustainable community park is strategically designed to reduce irrigation demands as wells as reduce operational expenses, and serve a wide variety of recreation needs through carefully coordinated scheduling and selected affordable fee based activities that will recoup 80-90% of maintenance and operational expenses. As a direct result of the Park System Master Plan, the long term future also looks bright as efforts are currently underway to identify and secure sustainable funding sources

for the ongoing stewardship and advancement of the Parks System.

