

Denver Parks & Recreation's Strategic Acquisition Plan

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Honor - General Planning Project

Denver's rich legacy of parks and open space has been built through multiple eras of innovative and intentional planning, design, and policy. In 2018, Denver residents voted for the further "greening" of the city by supporting a .25 percent sales tax dedicated to parks, trails, and open spaces, including land acquisition.

This sales tax measure is now known as the Parks Legacy Fund and has allowed Denver Parks and Recreation (DPR) to develop its Strategic Acquisition Plan—an investment framework that creates the city's first holistic strategy to grow an equitable and resilient parks system, outlining a process by which the department can consider acquisitions in a transparent and accountable manner.

Denver's Strategic Acquisition Plan provides criteria to identify and evaluate potential acquisitions, helping to make informed decisions that ensure value is added to the system and its users. The plan also identifies a "toolbox" of

acquisition techniques and funding mechanisms which DPR can utilize to expand the city's parks and recreation system.

The plan was funded by the National Recreation & Park Association (NRPA) 10-Minute Walk Grant and developed through robust community engagement despite significant challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Particular attention was given to ensuring that people from historically underrepresented communities had an opportunity to participate in the planning process. These outreach efforts formed the final plan which identifies six acquisition focus areas:

1. **Equity**, with a goal to proactively invest in the highest-need areas in coordination with other neighborhood needs and community benefits.
2. **10-minute walk or roll**, with a goal of providing all residents with a quality park within a 10-minute walk or roll of their home (and within 5-minutes downtown).
3. **Resilience**, with a goal to cultivate a sustainable network of wildlife habitat corridors, waterways, and recreational areas that can help the park system adapt to a changing climate.
4. **Mountain Parks**, with a goal to provide accessible destination parks that focus on outdoor recreation, environmental education, and ecological preservation.
5. **Downtown and high-growth areas**, with a goal to meet the increasing recreational, cultural, and ecological demands on parks and public spaces in urban, high-density areas.
6. **Facilities**, with a goal to expand public stewardship and recreational opportunities while increasing park maintenance efficiency.

Since Denver's Parks Legacy Fund went into effect and the Strategic Acquisition Plan was adopted, more than \$7.3 million has been spent on new parkland acquisitions. In recent years, the urban parks system has grown by 31 acres and the mountain parks system by 450 acres. This plan confirms Denver's commitment to equity, resiliency, and ensuring the city's legacy of outdoor recreation endures for future generations.