



City of
Golden

A group of nine young children are running across a grassy field in a park. In the background, there are trees with yellow autumn foliage and a playground structure. The scene is bright and sunny.

CITY OF GOLDEN, CO Parks and Recreation MASTER PLAN





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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



GOLDEN TODAY

The City of Golden is home to more than 21,000 residents and is defined by its unique blend of historic character, outdoor access, and small-town identity. Parks and recreation play a central role in this identity, with the Department managing 21 parks, 16 open space properties, Fossil Trace Golf Club, 27 miles of trails, and signature facilities such as the Golden Community Center, The Splash Aquatic Park, Clear Creek RV Park, and Clear Creek Whitewater Park.

The Department also maintains 230,000 square feet of municipal facilities and oversees an urban forest of 6,000 trees, earning Tree City USA recognition for over 35 consecutive years. This Parks and Recreation Master Plan update establishes a 10-year vision to sustain Golden's reputation for excellence while adapting to community priorities, operational realities, and future needs.

Department at a glance:

21 parks

**16 open space
properties**

**Fossil Trace
Golf Club**

**27 miles
of trails**

**230,000 ft²
of municipal
facilities**



Community Voices

Community engagement was a cornerstone of the planning process, with more than 2,500 interactions across surveys, interviews, events, and online tools. Residents voiced strong support for reinvestment in existing assets, particularly the Golden Community Center, expansion of aquatics, improvements to trails and connectivity, and additional adult programming. Feedback also emphasized the need for clearer communication, expanded staffing, and attention to equity, especially in southern Golden where geographic and transportation barriers limit participation. These findings complement data analyses showing that Golden operates with lean resources compared to peers, balancing a wide scope of services on moderate per-capita spending and staffing levels.



System Strengths and Challenges

Benchmarking confirms Golden's strengths, including high park access and strong trail offerings, but also highlights gaps in adult program participation, uneven aquatics capacity, and aging playgrounds and building maintenance systems. Technology platforms such as RecTrac, WebTMA, and Cartegraph provide a foundation for data-driven decision-making but are not integrated. Addressing these limitations through reinvestment, program balance, and integrated systems will be critical to sustaining quality, advancing equity, and enhancing the overall user experience.



Priorities for the Future

The Plan organizes recommendations into six priorities: building organizational capacity; expanding access to facilities and programs; taking care of existing assets; expanding community recreation opportunities; supporting and advancing the Open Space Master Plan; and enhancing and sustaining Golden's trail system. Together, these priorities emphasize reinvestment in core facilities, development of a multi-year capital improvement program, expanded programming beyond the downtown, modernization of the Golden Community Center and The Splash, and improved technology and staffing systems to keep pace with community demand.



Moving Forward

Golden's system is exceptionally well used, with more than 630,000 annual visits recorded at just seven key sites, confirming both the popularity of recreation services and the pressure they face. Moving forward, the City must balance this high level of use with strategic reinvestment, equitable program delivery, and financial sustainability. By aligning community priorities with organizational capacity and dedicated funding sources such as the Lodging Tax, Open Space Fund, and Conservation Trust Fund, Golden is well positioned to protect its strengths, address critical needs, and continue its legacy as a leader in parks and recreation.

PRIORITY A:
Build Organizational Capacity



PRIORITY C:
Take Care of Existing Assets



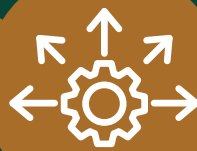
PRIORITY E:
Support and Advance the Open Space Master Plan



PRIORITY B:
Expand Access to Facilities and Programs



PRIORITY D:
Expand Community Recreation Opportunities

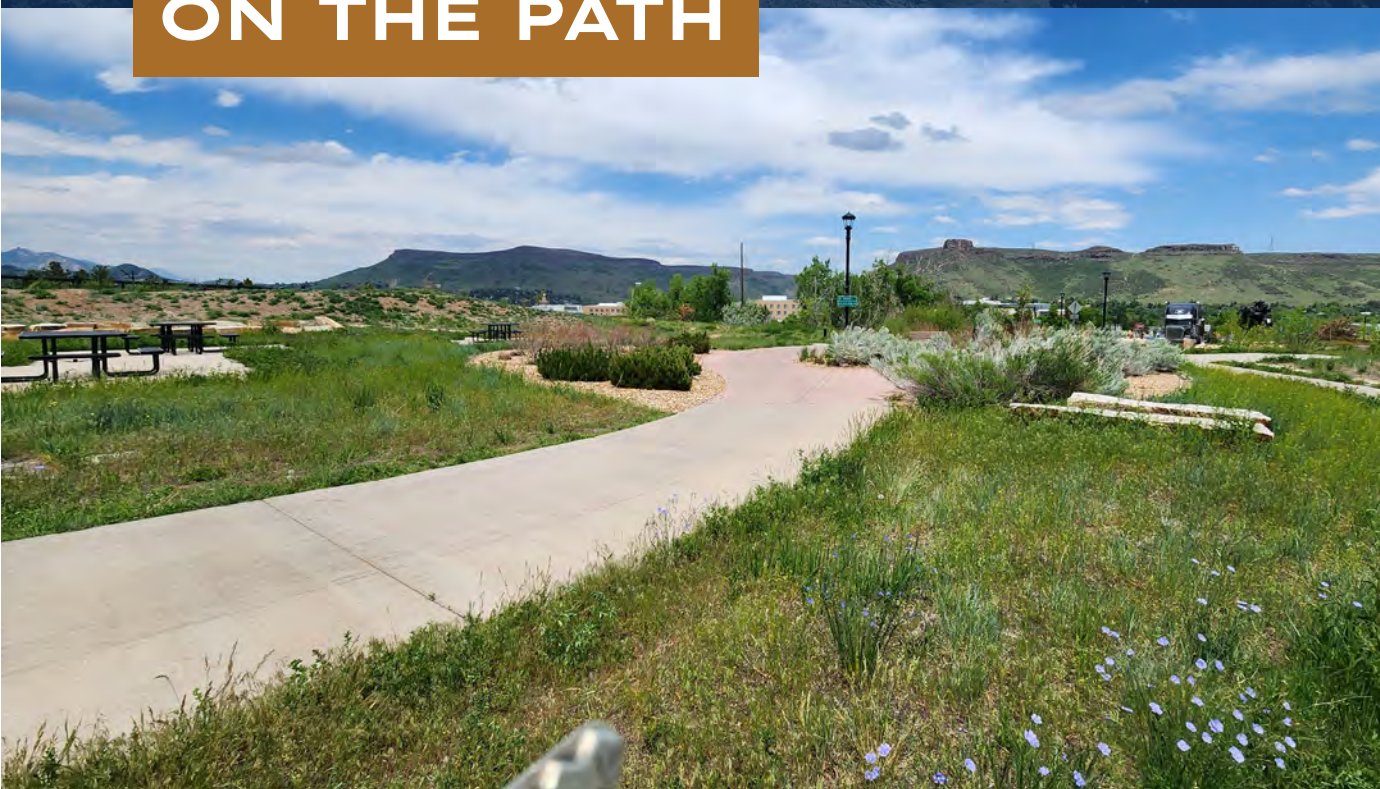


PRIORITY F:
Enhance and Sustain Golden's Trail System



1.0

ON THE PATH



The City of Golden (Golden) is a vibrant community of more than 21,000 residents, nestled between North and South Table Mountains at the base of the Rocky Mountain foothill. Known as the Gateway to the Rockies, Golden is defined by its historic downtown, outdoor access, and iconic landmarks such as Clear Creek and Table Mountain. Golden attracts both residents and visitors with its unique blend of small-town character, cultural resources, and abundant recreation opportunities.

1.0 On the Path

The Department of Parks and Recreation (Department) plays a central role in this identity by overseeing parks, open space, trails, recreation programs, specialized recreation facilities, and municipal buildings. The Department is guided by a vision for Golden to be recognized as a national leader in the provision of high-quality parks, trails, and recreation facilities, and a mission to enrich the lives of residents and visitors through inclusive and comprehensive services.

The Department manages 21 parks totaling 169 acres, 16 open space properties totaling 391 acres, and Fossil Trace Golf Club, which covers an additional 202 acres. It maintains more than 27 miles of trails and operates key facilities such as the Golden Community Center (GCC), The Splash Aquatic Park (The Splash), Clear Creek RV Park (RV Park), Clear Creek White Water Park, and the City Cemetery. The Department also manages 230,000 square feet of facilities and oversees forestry operations, caring for an urban forest of 6,000 trees that has earned Tree City USA recognition for over 35 consecutive years.



MISSION STATEMENT

To promote and provide safe and comprehensive community facilities, programs, and services that will enrich the quality of life for all residents and visitors

VISION STATEMENT

Golden will be recognized as a national leader in the provision of high-quality parks, trails, and recreation facilities.



Purpose of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan

This Parks and Recreation Master Plan (Plan) update establishes a long-term vision for the role of parks and recreation in Golden, helping to ensure the Department continues to reflect community priorities while delivering high-quality parks, facilities, and recreation opportunities. The Plan provides direction for investment, stewardship, and organizational capacity so Golden remains recognized as a leader in parks and recreation.

Golden completed its first parks and recreation master plan in 1986, followed by updates in 2008 and 2016, each guiding significant improvements to the system and its facilities. In 2009, the Department became accredited through the Commission for Accreditation

of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA), and earned the National Gold Medal Award for Excellence in Park and Recreation Management in 2010. These milestones underscore Golden's national reputation for excellence and its continued commitment to innovation and quality.

The update is timed to support Golden's re-accreditation through CAPRA, reaffirming its commitment to national best practices and continuous improvement. By aligning departmental goals with resident and stakeholder input, the plan will help ensure that Golden's parks and recreation opportunities continue to serve both current needs and the aspirations of future generations.

The Planning Process

The planning effort was branded Path to Play: Connecting Nature and Community, a theme that reflects Golden's defining features of outdoor access, historic character, and small-town identity. The brand highlights Golden's role as a Gateway to the Rockies, where wellness, trails, open space, and conservation are central values. It also conveys the community's commitment to building connection both among residents and between people and place while continuing to elevate the quality of Golden's parks, facilities, and recreation opportunities.

The process was led by Berry, Dunn, McNeil & Parker, LLC (BerryDunn), a national consulting firm specializing in local government strategy and operations.

This process was designed to help ensure the Plan reflects broad community input, builds on Golden's strengths, and positions the Department for continued success.

THE 12-MONTH PLANNING PROCESS INCLUDED:



- Engaging the community through surveys, focus groups, public meetings, and stakeholder discussions



- Evaluating operations, funding, and staffing relative to national and regional benchmarks



- Reviewing program offerings, participation trends, and unmet demand across different age groups and user types



- Assessing the park system's inventory, distribution, and condition to identify gaps in service and opportunities for reinvestment



Relationship To Recent Plans

This Plan builds on recently adopted plans and strives to ensure consistency while honoring citywide directives.

➔ **Open Space Master Plan, Phase 2 (2025):**

Provides a framework for preserving, conserving, and stewarding 391 acres of City-owned open space to ensure long-term ecological health, protect historical resources, and enrich the quality of life for Golden's residents and visitors.

➔ **Pedestrian & Bicycle Master Plan (2023):**

Establishes a citywide framework for safe and accessible multimodal transportation. Recent projects, such as the 13th Street Buffered Bike Lane and Ulysses Street corridor improvements, strengthen connections between neighborhoods, schools, and recreation facilities.

➔ **South Neighborhoods Plan (2023):**

This neighborhood-level plan outlines a future for Golden's southern communities that preserves nature while promoting improved connectivity, gathering places, and parkland. It includes early-stage planning for the South Neighborhood parcel as a new public park, new transportation crossings to bridge major highway barriers, and opportunities for thoughtful, community-centered land use. The plan reflects residents' value of natural areas, walkability, and access to amenities as central to South Golden's identity.

➔ **Heart of Golden (Ongoing):** Reimagines the Clear Creek corridor and civic spaces downtown, emphasizing the role of parks, natural areas, and gathering areas in shaping Golden's identity and future.

➔ **Civic Center Master Plan (2023):** Charts a path to modernize Golden's civic facilities, including recommendations for access from the GCC and adjacent spaces that align closely with priorities in this plan.

➔ **Golden Comprehensive Plan (2017):** Serves

as Golden's overarching land use and policy framework, integrating the community values outlined in Golden Vision 2030 and guiding citywide decision-making.

➔ **Golden Vision 2030 (2010):** Established the

community's long-term vision and core values, highlighting livability, recreation, and preservation principles carried forward in this Plan.

➔ **Clear Creek Management Plan (2014):** Focuses on

balancing recreation with environmental protection by emphasizing stream health, riparian restoration, and operational practices that safeguard the creek while supporting public use.

➔ **Clear Creek Corridor Master Plan (2011):** Provides

the vision for the Clear Creek corridor as a linear park, with improved pedestrian connectivity, parking solutions, community gathering spaces, and upgraded facilities.

➔ **Creek Management Strategies (2023 – 2025):**

Include updated creek regulations, outfitter permitting, and City code revisions to adaptively manage recreation demand while safeguarding natural resources.

➔ **Community Sustainability Plans:** Establish

citywide goals for energy, water, waste, and climate resilience. The Parks and Recreation Department advances these goals through conservation practices, efficient facility operations, and zero-waste initiatives at parks and community events.

These initiatives provide a strong foundation for this Plan and reinforce Golden's commitment to balancing preservation with growth while sustaining its reputation as a leader in parks and recreation.

Golden Demographic Profile

Understanding Golden's demographic profile helps frame how the Department will serve the community in the years ahead. Golden's population was estimated at 21,049 residents in 2024, reflecting steady growth of more than 22% since 2000. Projections show continued, but modest, growth to 21,203 residents by 2029.

Golden is a relatively young community, with a median age of 35.1 years compared to 38.1 statewide and 39.1 nationally. At the same time, 77% of residents are adults over the age of 18, underscoring the importance of recreation services that support a broad spectrum of adult life stages. Figure 1 shows the distribution of the population by age group.

Golden has also become increasingly diverse. Since 2010, the proportion of residents identifying as White has declined, while the share of Hispanic residents and those identifying with two or more races has grown. The most diverse neighborhoods are generally located in central and southern Golden.

Golden has a diverse economic profile, with household incomes that vary across the community. While Golden overall enjoys higher median household incomes than state and national averages, important differences exist between neighborhoods. Higher income households are concentrated on the edges of the community, while lower income households (shown in white) are more common near South Table Mountain Park and west of Fossil Trace Golf Club. These variations underscore the importance of equitable access to facilities and programs. Figure 2 illustrates median household income by census block in 2024, highlighting areas of relative affluence as well as areas where affordability and access considerations are most important.

Please note that the white areas of the map labeled in the map key as "Less than \$40,000" contain a mixture of private residences, undeveloped private property, state land, and city and county open space. In some cases, the inclusion of student housing or undeveloped private property resulted in a low

Figure 1: Age Group Distribution

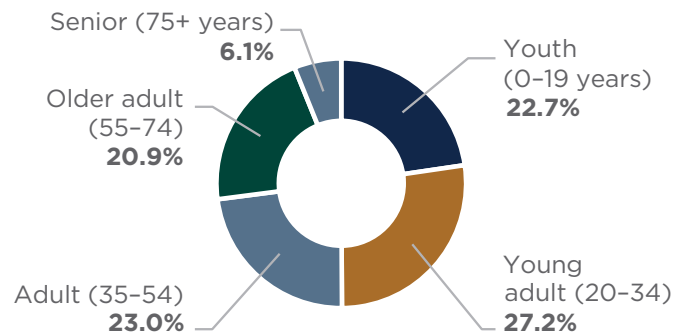
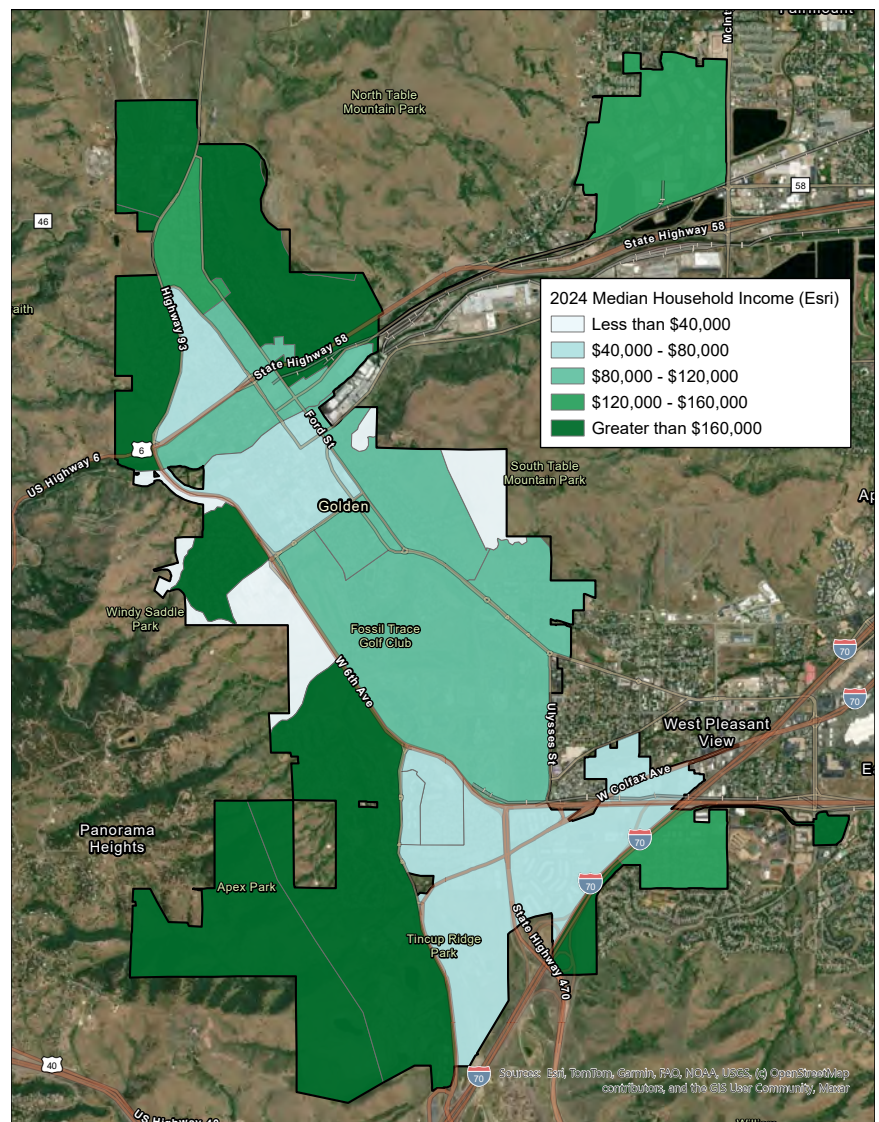


Figure 2: Median Household Income



No major demographic shifts are anticipated over the life of this Plan. Instead, trends point to a community that is growing slowly but steadily, is younger than its peers, and is becoming more economically and racially diverse. For parks and recreation, this means maintaining affordability, working to ensure equity in access across all neighborhoods, and designing services that reflect the needs of a primarily adult population alongside meaningful opportunities for youth.

BerryDunn sourced population, age distribution, income, race/ethnicity, and other household characteristic data from ArcGIS Business Analyst using July 2024 U.S. Census estimates. Comparisons to Colorado and U.S. data are included where relevant to provide additional context.



Visitor Trends

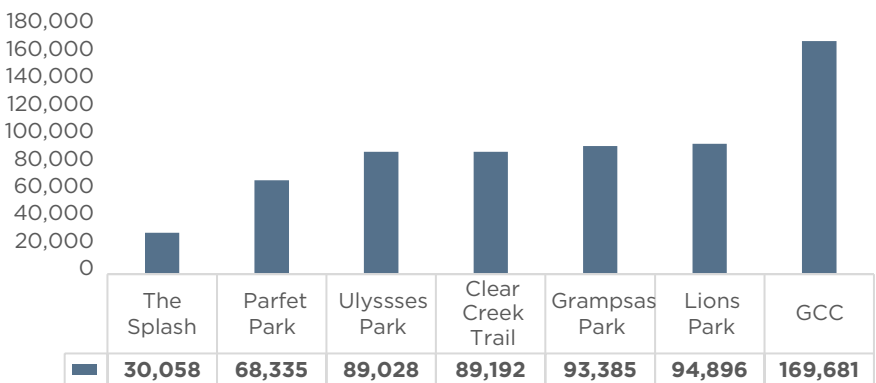
Golden’s parks, trails, and recreation facilities attract a significant level of users each year, reflecting their central role in community life. Using mobility data from Placer.ai, BerryDunn analyzed visitation in 2023 across seven key destinations: the GCC, Splash, Clear Creek Trail, Grampsas Park, Lions Park, Parfet Park, and Ulysses Park. Together, these facilities and parks recorded more than 630,000 visits, underscoring both the popularity of Golden’s recreation system and the pressures it faces in meeting community needs. The GCC stood out as the most heavily used facility, drawing nearly 170,000 visits annually, with activity peaking during the winter months when indoor recreation is most in demand.

Conversely, outdoor destinations such as Lions Park, Grampsas Park, Ulysses Park, Parfet Park, and Clear Creek Trail collectively accounted for hundreds of thousands of visits, particularly in the spring and summer months when outdoor recreation thrives.

Even The Splash, which operates only during the summer season, recorded more than 30,000 visits, demonstrating strong seasonal demand.

Patterns of use also highlight how Golden’s system serves not only residents but also visitors from the surrounding region. While community members make up a significant share of visits to neighborhood-based facilities like the GCC and The Splash, regional users travel 10 – 30 miles to access destinations such as Clear Creek Trail, Lions Park, and Ulysses Park. These travel patterns confirm Golden’s role as both a community and regional recreation hub.

Figure 3: Visitation, 2023





These findings show a system that is exceptionally well used, balancing daily local demand with significant regional draw. For the Department, the challenge moving forward will be sustaining this high level of service, maintaining quality experiences even as visitation remains strong, and working to ensure that

facilities and parks can continue to welcome hundreds of thousands of users each year. Table 1 summarizes annual visitation levels and key usage patterns across Golden's most visited parks, trails, and facilities in 2023.

Table 1: Visitation Trends Summary, 2023

Facility	2023 Visitation	Most Popular Month	Most Popular Day	Most Popular Time of Day	Most Common Distance Traveled
GCC	169,681	December	Monday	12 p.m.	3 – 5 miles
Lions Park	94,896	July	Sunday	3 p.m.	10 – 30 miles
Grampsas Park	93,385	April	Saturday	5 p.m.	10 – 30 miles
Ulysses Park	89,028	June	Friday	6 p.m.	10 – 30 miles
Clear Creek Trail	86,192	July	Saturday	3 p.m.	10 – 30 miles
Parfet Park	68,335	July	Saturday	2 p.m.	10 – 30 miles
The Splash	30,058	July	Saturday	1 p.m.	7 – 10 miles

2.0

VOICES ALONG THE WAY



Golden made community engagement a cornerstone of this project, inviting residents to play an active role in shaping the future of parks and recreation. This effort worked to ensure that voices from across the city informed the plan and reflected Golden's strong culture of recreation as a daily way of life.

How the Community Shared Their Voice

From fall 2024 through spring 2025, residents contributed input through in-person meetings, community events, online tools, and a statistically valid survey. The process was designed to meet people where they are, broaden participation, and elevate voices historically underrepresented in public planning. Opportunities included:

- Focus group sessions and stakeholder interviews with community leaders, partner organizations, and user groups
- Public open house and interactive activities at community events such as Movies and Music in the Park, the Golden Farmers Market, Golden Gallop, Golden Cruise, and the Golden Autumn Festival
- Guiding Golden project website, which provided ongoing updates, access to plan materials, and opportunities to submit feedback online
- Statistically valid survey capturing citywide perceptions, priorities, and satisfaction with current parks and recreation services

In total, these efforts generated more than 2,500 interactions across engagements, reflecting a broad and representative cross-section of the Golden community. Feedback consistently emphasized the importance of reinvesting in existing parks and facilities, particularly the GCC, expanding adult and nature-based programming and improving access to aquatics. Trails and connectivity were among the highest priorities, while residents also called for practical amenities such as bathrooms, shaded areas, and splashpads. Across all engagement types, participants highlighted the need for clearer communication and additional staffing to sustain high-quality service delivery.



Focus Groups and Stakeholder Interviews

A series of stakeholder interviews and focus group sessions engaged 38 participants, including the mayor, City Council members, and representatives from various Golden departments, advisory boards, community organizations, and partner agencies. Participants also included members of the Golden History Museum, Public Art Commission, Golden Urban Renewal Authority, Golden Chamber of Commerce, and the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB), along with local instructors, civic leaders, and longtime residents.

EACH DISCUSSION FOLLOWED A CONSISTENT STRUCTURE GUIDED BY SIX CORE TOPICS:

- **Organizational Effectiveness** – Perceptions of the Department and its role
- **Parks** – Maintenance, quality, and desired amenities
- **Indoor Facilities** – Accessibility, condition, and needed improvements
- **Programs** – Ideas for classes, events, and recreation opportunities
- **Communication** – Evaluation of outreach and information-sharing methods
- **Long-Term Priorities** – Investments and improvements for the next 5–10 years

Community Events and Open House

To reach residents in accessible and familiar settings, the project team hosted a dedicated open house and participated in six well-attended community events across Golden. Engagement tools included dot voting exercises, interactive boards, and informational displays. These activities helped identify valued programs, park amenities, and facility needs. In total, more than 900 individuals engaged with the project team through these events, providing valuable citywide input in casual, approachable environments.

Guiding Golden Website

The project team leveraged the Guiding Golden platform to provide an online engagement experience. The site featured project updates, background materials, and interactive tools such as an ideas wall and interactive map. The project page received 1,110 visits and generated 97 contributions.

Statistically Valid Survey

To gather citywide feedback on recreation needs, ETC Institute conducted a statistically valid survey. The goal was to collect a minimum of 400 completed surveys from a random, geographically representative sample of Golden residents. This goal was exceeded, with 433 completed surveys, resulting in a margin of error of $\pm 4.6\%$ at the 95% confidence level. The survey included a Priority Investment Rating (PIR) to identify where to focus resources. PIR scores above 100 indicate high priorities, and several facilities and programs exceeded this threshold, confirming strong community demand.

Summary of Engagement Findings

These engagement methods generated both broad participation and detailed perspectives. Table 2 provides a summary of the reach and key findings from each method. While this chapter presents an overview of the process and themes, additional findings are integrated into the chapters that follow on facilities, programs, operations, and long-term priorities.

Table 2: Key Engagement Findings

Engagement Type	Format and Reach	Key Findings
Statistically Valid Survey	433 responses from a randomized, representative sample of residents; $\pm 4.6\%$ margin of error	High facility use (97%), strong satisfaction with quality (94%); priority investment areas include Clear Creek Corridor, reinvestment in parks, and land acquisition. Top PIR Facility Priorities: • Multiuse soft surface trails (PIR=157) • Multiuse paved trails (PIR=137) • Community center (PIR=124) • Outdoor amphitheater (PIR=116) Top PIR Program Priorities: • Adult fitness and wellness (PIR=194) • Cultural enrichment (PIR=133) • Nature/environmental programs (PIR=116) • Mental wellness (PIR=116) • Recreational swim (PIR=110) • Mountain biking (PIR=106) • Tennis/pickleball (PIR=105) • Pottery (PIR=100)
Focus Groups and Stakeholder Interviews	38 participants representing Golden leadership, partner organizations, and engaged residents	Participants shared strong support for improved coordination, capital planning, staffing increases, and reinvestment in underutilized parks and indoor facilities.
Community Events and Open House	900+ participants at six events using dot voting and interactive boards	High-value amenities included aquatics and youth play areas. Participants prioritized adult sports, swim lessons, and nature-based programs.
Guiding Golden Website	1,110 visits and 97 contributions via ideas wall and interactive map	Suggestions focused on swim access, fitness program variety, more park bathrooms, bike racks, splashpads, and clearer project updates.

3.0

BEHIND THE SCENES OF PLAY



The organizational assessment provides an overview of how the Department is structured, staffed, and funded, highlighting the systems in place to deliver parks, facilities, and recreational opportunities. It also examines the Department's operational scope, resource allocation, and financial framework. These insights form the foundation for recommendations presented later in the plan.

Organizational Content

The Department is led by a director of parks and recreation and supported by a recreation supervisor who oversees department-wide administration and special projects. The Department is structured into two primary operational branches: Land Management and Recreation and Golf. Each branch is overseen by a deputy director and includes multiple functional areas, as shown in Figure 4.

Land Management

PARKS, CEMETERY, OPEN SPACE, AND FORESTRY:

Responsible for land stewardship, park, athletic field and cemetery maintenance, urban forest management, and coordination of volunteer efforts

FACILITIES DIVISION: Maintains more than 25 City-owned buildings that extend beyond Parks and Recreation facilities, providing maintenance, custodial, and technical services with a focus on safety, sustainability, and accessibility

Recreation and Golf

RECREATION AND AQUATICS: Manages indoor and outdoor recreation programs and facilities, including the GCC and The Splash

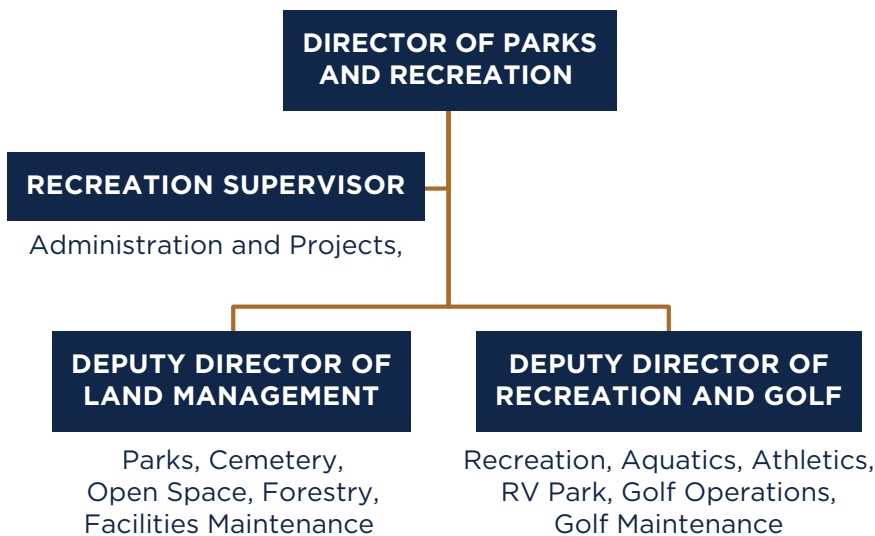
ATHLETIC PROGRAMMING AND RV PARK

OPERATIONS: Supports youth and adult leagues, field scheduling, and RV Park operations

GOLF MAINTENANCE AND OPERATIONS:

Maintains Fossil Trace Golf Club and support year-round golf operations

Figure 4: Department Organizational Structure



Staffing is allocated across all functional areas and includes full-time, part-time, and seasonal personnel. Divisions such as Facilities and Forestry also leverage contracted services for specialized maintenance needs. For example, the Facilities Division manages custodial and technical services for buildings owned by Golden.

A PRAB advises City Council and staff on matters related to the operation, development, expansion, and growth specific to parks and recreation. The Board also serves as a conduit between the community and the City, gathering and assessing citizen input to inform recommendations on current services, future facilities, and programs.

Funding and Financial Structure

The Department is funded through a combination of General Fund allocations and Enterprise Fund revenues, reflecting the broad range of services it provides. The General Fund plays a critical role in supporting core functions such as park maintenance, open space management, trail upkeep, and department-wide administration. It also helps cover staffing costs across divisions, supports forestry and facilities maintenance, and subsidizes operations for facilities that do not fully recover their expenses through user fees.

Across all divisions, expenditures are tracked by salaries, services, and capital equipment. While cost recovery rates are monitored to balance community access with financial sustainability, the Department does not yet have a formal cost recovery policy or defined targets by program area to guide long-term funding decisions.

Several key facilities including the GCC, Fossil Trace Golf Course, The Splash, Clear Creek RV Park, and City Cemetery operate under an enterprise model.

These facilities maintain separate enterprise funds designed to recover most operational costs through user charges; however, many still rely on General Fund support to close revenue gaps and ensure continued public access.

THE DEPARTMENT'S ENTERPRISE FUNDS INCLUDE:

- **Community Center Fund:** Supports daily operations, programs, and capital improvements at the GCC
- **Cemetery Operations Fund:** Covers maintenance and capital needs for the City Cemetery
- **The Splash Aquatic Park Fund:** Funds seasonal operations at the The Splash Aquatic Park
- **Fossil Trace Golf Course Fund:** Supports operations and maintenance of the 18-hole municipal golf course

While these funds follow enterprise accounting principles, they might not meet the formal definition of an enterprise fund under the Colorado Taxpayer's Bill of Rights (TABOR) Amendment. Nevertheless, they are treated as self-supporting for operational and financial planning purposes, with general cost recovery goals established and monitored for long-term sustainability.

Capital investments are incorporated into Golden's Capital Improvement Program (CIP) process, which allows departments to submit requests for multiple years if desired. However, the Department currently prepares and submits its CIP requests one year at a time. While this ensures annual oversight, it limits the ability to phase projects strategically or apply consistent criteria for prioritizing long-term needs.

CAPITAL PROJECTS ARE PRIMARILY FUNDED THROUGH DEDICATED REVENUE SOURCES:

- **Lodging Tax Fund:** Generated from an excise tax on overnight commercial lodging stays. Funds are used to address visitor impacts and support community projects as needed.
- **Open Space Fund:** Supports park land acquisition and development through the City's share of Jefferson County's ½-cent sales and use tax for open space (approximately \$850,000 annually).
- **Conservation Trust Fund:** Restricted to park development and improvements, funded through Colorado Lottery proceeds (approximately \$250,000 annually).

Why Move to a Multi-Year CIP Framework?

Transitioning from an annual-only CIP process to a multi-year capital improvement plan would:

- **IMPROVE STRATEGIC PLANNING:** Align projects with master plan priorities and community needs over a 5–10 year horizon.
- **SUPPORT TRANSPARENT DECISION-MAKING:** Use standardized criteria like safety, equity, and asset condition to rank and phase projects.
- **LEVERAGE EXTERNAL FUNDING:** Position the City to pursue grants, partnerships, and cost-sharing opportunities with shovel-ready projects.
- **STRENGTHEN FINANCIAL FORECASTING:** Provide a clearer picture of future capital needs and operating impacts before commitments are made.
- **ENHANCE PUBLIC COMMUNICATION:** Show residents how projects are prioritized and funded over time, building trust and accountability.
- **MAXIMIZE USE OF DEDICATED REVENUE SOURCES:** Better coordinate the use of lodging tax, open space sales tax, and conservation trust funds to ensure they are strategically invested where they have the greatest impact.

Unique Enterprise Facilities: Golden Cemetery and Clear Creek RV Park

The Department manages two facilities rarely found within municipal park systems, each requiring specialized operations while contributing to the city's heritage, recreation access, and financial sustainability.

The 57-acre Golden Cemetery serves as both an active burial ground and a historic landmark, reflecting the city's cultural heritage while meeting ongoing community needs. Management involves specialized grounds care, record keeping, and customer service responsibilities that extend beyond traditional park operations.

Clear Creek RV Park, operating year-round with a 95% occupancy rate, offers 22 full hook-up sites, 11 50-amp electric-only sites, 3 tent campsites, restrooms, showers, laundry facilities, and a dump station. Its location along Clear Creek provides direct access to trails, downtown Golden, and recreation amenities, blending visitor services with recreation access in ways uncommon for city park systems.

Together, these facilities function as enterprise operations requiring dedicated staffing, reservation systems, and long-term reinvestment planning to maintain service quality while generating revenue to support Golden's broader parks and recreation system.



Technology and Asset Management

The Department has invested in several technology platforms that, if fully leveraged, can significantly improve efficiency, data-driven decision-making, and long-term asset stewardship. Current systems include:

1. RecTrac for program registration, membership management, and customer tracking
2. WebTMA for facility maintenance and work order management
3. Cartegraph for asset management, used to inventory, monitor, and prioritize infrastructure across the parks and recreation system

While these systems provide a strong foundation, they are not currently being used to their full potential. Data integration between platforms is limited, resulting in duplicative processes and underutilized information. Preventive maintenance scheduling and life cycle cost tracking are available in Cartegraph and WebTMA but are inconsistently applied. In addition, RecTrac's reporting capacity is constrained by inconsistent setup of memberships and classes, which reduces the accuracy and usefulness of participation and revenue data. Establishing standardized practices for program setup would unlock RecTrac's potential to provide valuable insights into participation trends, staffing needs, and facility scheduling. Additional efficiencies could be achieved by enabling members to self-scan when entering facilities. This would reduce the time staff spend on manual check-ins while still capturing accurate usage data for reporting.

Best practice among high-performing parks and recreation agencies is to integrate systems so that data flows seamlessly across functions. Applying this principle in Golden means focusing first on Asset and Work Order Integration, which would connect WebTMA and Cartegraph to track all maintenance activities in one coordinated system.

TANGIBLE EXAMPLE OF INTEGRATION

- A work order created in WebTMA to repair a chiller at the GCC could automatically feed cost and labor data into Cartegraph, helping to ensure life cycle costs are captured in one place
- A preventive maintenance schedule in Cartegraph (such as a playground safety inspection) could trigger related facility tasks in WebTMA if overlapping systems (e.g., restroom plumbing or lighting) are identified

Leveraging RecTrac, WebTMA, and Cartegraph more consistently and in coordination would reduce duplication, improve planning, and give the Department the data needed to manage both programs and assets proactively. This aligns with best practices and supports sustainable service delivery into the future.

RecTrac and the RV Park

RecTrac is currently being used to manage reservations at the RV Park; however, the system is not equipped to handle park-specific functions such as dynamic site mapping, variable pricing, or integrated waitlist management. As a result, staff must rely on manual workarounds that limit operational efficiency and reduce the customer experience. Exploring reservation management software designed for RV parks or adding specialized modules to RecTrac would allow the Department to streamline reservations, improve financial reporting, and automate communication with guests. This upgrade would align campground operations with best practices while freeing staff time for customer service and facility oversight.

An asset is any resource, property, or facility that the City manages and that provides value to the community. Examples include parks, trails, natural areas, recreation centers, and other built facilities.

4.0

HOW WE MEASURE UP



Benchmarking similar jurisdictions provides insight into agency operations, budgets, and staffing, helping to assess the Department's service levels and resource allocation. The Department selected peer agencies with similar population sizes located in Colorado to make the comparisons more relevant and meaningful. These agencies face comparable challenges in managing parks and recreation services, allowing for more accurate benchmarking of resources. Data was researched and sourced from National Parks and Recreation Association (NRPA) Park Metrics, as well as from agency websites, previous master plans, and annual budgets.

The five agencies benchmarked for this study are:

- City of Wheat Ridge, Parks and Recreation (Wheat Ridge)
- City of Louisville, Parks and Recreation Department (Louisville)
- City of Windsor, Parks and Recreation (Windsor)
- City of Englewood, Parks and Recreation (Englewood)
- Town of Erie, Parks and Recreation Department (Erie)

The agencies in this study have similar population sizes and geographic footprints. Populations range from 20,000 to 42,000 residents, with Golden at the lower end. Louisville is most comparable to Golden in population, while Erie has the largest land area among the peer cities. Notably, three of the five benchmarked agencies are CAPRA accredited, and one is currently pursuing accreditation. This underscores the high standards of professional practice among Golden's peers and highlights the value of benchmarking against agencies recognized for excellence in the field.

Table 3 summarizes the size, budget, staffing, and service responsibilities of the Department and its peer agencies. This side-by-side comparison highlights similarities in population and land area while also showing variations in funding levels, staffing ratios, park acreage, and the number of services offered. The final rows identify which agencies provide each of the 22 tracked services, illustrating both common core offerings and unique areas where the Department's scope exceeds that of its peers.

Service Responsibilities

The Department maintains a well-balanced and accessible park and trail system. With 21 parks and just 1,169 residents per park, Golden offers strong neighborhood-level access. Its 7.8 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents exceeds most peer communities benchmarked, and its 27 miles of trails support both recreation and regional connectivity. While Golden's total acreage is smaller than some larger systems, its per capita metrics highlight an efficient and responsive network.

Table 3 highlights both common responsibilities across agencies and distinct service areas that set the Department apart. This comparison provides useful context for understanding the Department's operational scope and evaluating budget and staffing needs.



Across all benchmarked cities, six core service areas are consistently provided: park sites, indoor facilities, non-park sites, trails and greenways, special-purpose parks and open spaces, and recreation programming. These foundational services reflect common community expectations and form the baseline for comparison.

The Department's responsibilities extend beyond its core functions, offering 17 of the 22 benchmarked services, the broadest scope among peer agencies.

Englewood and Windsor each provide 15 services, though both serve larger populations than Golden. Golden is also the only agency responsible for building maintenance outside of the parks and recreation department, overseeing nearly 400,000 square feet of facilities in addition to parks and recreation assets. The Department is also the only agency to operate and maintain a RV park. These expanded functions reflect the Department's broader role in community development and visitor services.

Funding and Staffing

The Department delivers a well-distributed and sizable park and trail system with moderate per capita funding and staffing. This balance reflects operational efficiency but may present challenges for long-term sustainability if service levels are expected to grow.

**Golden spends
\$284 per resident**

**Louisville leads
in spending
at \$403.84 per
resident**

**Golden provides
13.77 full-time
employees per
10,000 residents**

- Higher than Wheat Ridge and Windsor but lower than Englewood, Erie, and Louisville.

- Due in large part to its extensive open space system, which spans nearly 2,000 acres.

- Higher than Windsor (12.84)
- Similar to Erie (13.85)
- Lower than Englewood (15.68) and Wheat Ridge (15.13)
- Well below Louisville (28.15) who has 10 full-time open space employees

These figures reflect general fund allocations only and do not include enterprise or special revenue funds or positions. In general, as population increases, per capita spending tends to decrease because fixed costs are distributed across more residents. For example, Windsor, the largest community in the comparison with nearly 43,000 residents, spends \$220 per capita—22% less than Golden's \$284 per capita—even though its total parks budget is 59% higher. This demonstrates that while larger communities benefit from economies of scale, Golden must sustain a wide scope of services with a much smaller population base, reinforcing the need for additional funding to maintain service quality and responsiveness.

Table 3: Agency Size

	Golden	Englewood	Erie	Louisville	Wheat Ridge	Windsor
Population	21,049	35,392	36,835	21,226	32,390	42,840
Square Miles	10	7	48	8	8.5	27
CAPRA Accredited	Yes	No	Yes	In-progress	Yes	Yes
2024 General Fund Expenditures	\$5.9m	\$10m	\$11.8m	\$8.6m	\$7.4m	\$9.4
2024 Per Capita Spending	\$284	\$286	\$322	\$403	\$228	\$220
General Fund, Full-time Employees	29	55.5	51	59.75	49	55
FTE per 10,000 population	13.77	15.68	13.85	28.15	15.13	12.84
Total number of parks	21	17	13	37	21	27
Total park acres	164	151	163	355	170	250
Number of residents per park	1,169	2,117	2,833	1,111	1,542	1,586
Acres of parkland per 1,000 Residents	7.8	4.3	4.4	16.7	5.2	5.8
Trail miles	27	20	40	32	7	30
Operate and maintain park sites	●	●	●	●	●	●
Operate indoor facilities	●	●	●	●	●	●
Maintains agency indoor facilities	●					
Operate, maintain, or contract golf courses	●	●				
Operate, maintain, or RV park	●					
Operate, maintain or contract cemeteries	●		●	●		

	Golden	Englewood	Erie	Louisville	Wheat Ridge	Windsor
Operate, maintain, or contract indoor swim facilities/water parks	●	●	●		●	●
Operate, maintain, or contract outdoor swim facilities/water parks	●	●	●		●	●
Operate, maintain, or contract racquet sport activities/courts/facilities	●	●	●		●	●
Operate, maintain, or contract tourism attractions	●	●				●
Provide recreation programming and services	●	●	●	●	●	●
Operate and maintain non-park sites	●	●	●	●	●	●
Operate, maintain, or manage trails, greenways, and/or blueways	●	●	●	●	●	●
Operate, maintain, or manage special-purpose parks and open spaces	●	●	●	●	●	●
Maintain, manage or lease indoor performing arts center		●				
Administer or manage farmers markets						
Administer community gardens		●				●
Manage large performance outdoor amphitheaters						●

4.0 How We Measure Up

	Golden	Englewood	Erie	Louisville	Wheat Ridge	Windsor
Administer or manage tournament/event quality outdoor sports complexes	●	●	●			●
Conduct major jurisdiction wide special events	●	●	●	●		●
Operate, maintain or contract marinas						●
Maintain or manage beaches (inclusive of all waterbody types)	●					●

* In FY2025, the City converted 12 part-time positions (1 cemetery, 1 RV park, 10 at the GCC including preschool, front counter, and pottery) into full-time roles. This change should be accounted for in future benchmarking.



5.0

PROGRAMS THAT CONNECT



The Department delivers recreation opportunities that bring residents together, support healthy lifestyles, and strengthen Golden's sense of community. From youth sports and aquatics to adult fitness and lifelong learning, programs are designed to serve all ages and interests. This chapter offers a snapshot of current participation and facilities, providing a foundation for understanding trends and guiding future program development.

Program Menu

Registration data for 2024 reflects participation across 1,034 programs, many of which are recurring. These programs are grouped into eight categories to better understand community interests and engagement. Categorizing programs allows trends to be identified, effectiveness assessed, and future offerings tailored to participant needs.

Figure 5 summarizes registration by program category, providing a high-level view of participation patterns.

Table 4 presents a detailed analysis of registration and waitlist data by category. It includes program definitions, registration totals, waitlist counts, and observations that highlight participation levels, demand, and opportunities for growth or improvement.



Figure 5: 2024 Enrollment by Category

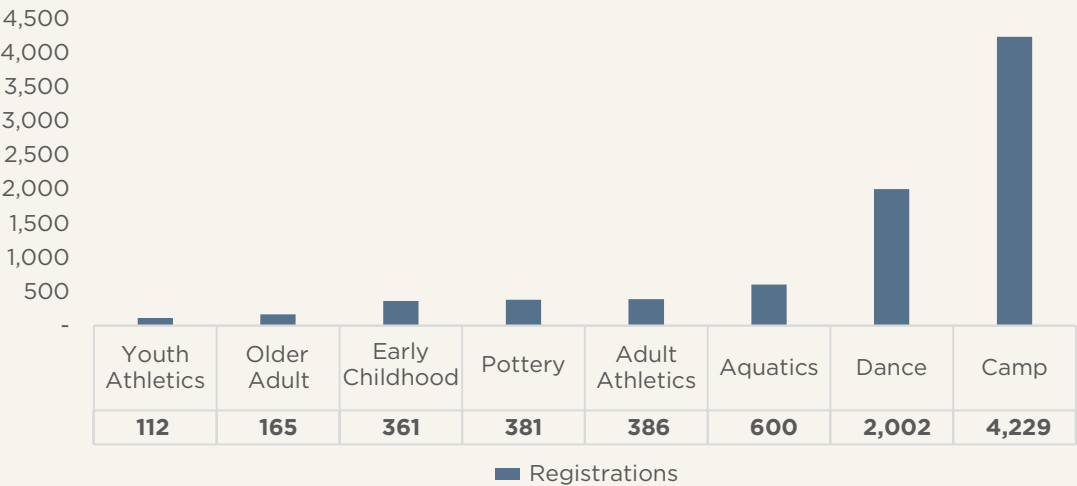


Table 4: 2024 Registration and Waitlist Analysis (2024)

Program	Definition	Registration	Waitlist	Analysis
Adult Athletics	Organized recreational leagues and tournaments for adults, including men's and coed softball, kickball, and tennis lessons. Seasonal programming includes summer and fall leagues and a coed softball tournament in November that supports local food pantry donations.	30 teams	0	Moderate participation with no waitlist. Growth opportunities may include adding alternative sports or off-season leagues.
Aquatics	Aquatic programs for all ages, including progressive swim lessons, aquatic fitness classes such as aquacize, water walking, and Arthritis Foundation programs.	600	57	Strong participation and waitlist indicate capacity constraints. Consider expanding swim lesson availability, adding instructors, or adjusting pool schedules to meet demand.
Camps	Full-day and half-day seasonal camps offering recreational, educational, and social activities for children ages 3 – 12. Includes summer camp, preschool camp, spring/winter break camps, and specialty programs like hiking, art projects, and field trips.	4,229	45	Very high participation with a low waitlist suggests strong demand and well-managed capacity. Minor expansions or targeted adjustments may improve access further.
Dance	Instructional dance programs primarily for ages 3 – 16 covering ballet, tap, jazz, hip hop, and more, with seasonal sessions culminating in recitals. Adult ballet classes are also offered.	2,002	8	Dance maintains steady participation and minimal waitlist, showing strong retention. Increasing adult dance offerings or advanced classes may boost engagement.
Early Childhood	Licensed preschool and early childhood enrichment programs that emphasize learning, movement, and play. Includes full-day and half-day preschool options and JumpBunch specialty programs for young children, such as Fitness Fun for Tots, Super Ninjas, and themed summer camps.	361	26	Camps and field trips continue to perform well, reflecting strong interest in short-term, activity-based offerings. However, the preschool program has struggled in recent years, with enrollment averaging around 50% capacity. Reassessing the program model, schedule, or marketing approach may help boost participation.

5.0 Programs that Connect

Program	Definition	Registration	Waitlist	Analysis
Pottery	Creative arts programs teaching ceramic and pottery techniques for all ages, from introductory classes for children to advanced courses for adults. Includes Mud Makers for ages 3 – 6 and Clay Creations for ages 6 – 10.	381	45	High demand and a large waitlist indicate significant unmet interest. Consider expanding studio capacity, offering more sessions, or increasing instructor availability.
Older Adult	Programs for adults ages 50 and older offering fitness classes, social opportunities, enrichment workshops, and special interest activities such as quilting, Mah Jongg, and wellness programs. Classes include pickleball, yoga, pottery, and AARP safety courses.	165	0	Participation is modest with no waitlist, indicating existing supply aligns with demand. Additional program variety or partnerships may enhance engagement.
Youth Athletics	Seasonal sports clinics, leagues, and camps for children, including volleyball, tennis, track, and multi-sport programs. Partner programs through Skyhawks include instruction in soccer, basketball, flag football, and specialty summer sports camps.	112	0	Low participation compared to other programs suggests limited offerings or awareness. Marketing efforts and expanded youth leagues could increase involvement.

*Numbers do not account for drop-in social programs that do not require registration.





GOLDEN COMMUNITY CENTER

Golden Community Center

The GCC is Golden's primary indoor recreation facility and is a cornerstone of community life. Opened in 1994 and renovated in 2007, the 71,000-square-foot facility offers a wide range of amenities that promote health, wellness, and social connection. The center features a fitness area with cardio and strength equipment, group exercise studios, a gymnasium with an elevated track, and an aquatics area with a lap pool, leisure pool, sauna, and hot tub. Additional spaces include multipurpose rooms for classes and community events and the Front Porch, a dedicated area for adults ages 50 and older.

The GCC operates year-round as a hub for recreation, social interaction, and lifelong learning. Programs serve all ages and interests, including fitness classes, aquatic programs, youth camps, licensed preschool, enrichment activities, and wellness services, contributing significantly to Golden's quality of life.

Membership and Participation

In 2024, the GCC recorded nearly 900 annual memberships, demonstrating strong community participation and highlighting its role as a central recreation hub for Golden residents. However, for a 71,000-square-foot facility serving a community of Golden's size, this participation level suggests room for significant growth. National benchmarking data from the NRPA and comparable recreation centers often show membership participation rates ranging from 10 to 15 percent of the service area population, particularly when facilities offer a full range of amenities like aquatics, fitness, and multipurpose programming. With Golden's population exceeding 20,000 residents, nearly 900 memberships represent less than 5 percent of the community, well below typical targets for similar facilities. This indicates strong potential to expand membership, especially with facility reinvestment, updated amenities, expanded program offerings, and more flexible membership options such as family passes or bundled pricing.

Community Priorities and Facility Investment

The community survey ranked reinvestment in the GCC as the third-highest priority investment, reflecting both strong public support and the need for modernization.

Pricing and Fee Structure

The GCC uses a resident and non-resident fee structure for daily passes, multi-visit cards, and annual memberships. Non-resident rates are generally 20 to 24 percent higher than resident rates across most categories, including adult, senior, and youth passes. A notable exception is the daily pass for tots ages 0 to 5, which has a 41 percent difference, nearly double the gap in other categories. This disparity might warrant review to help ensure consistency in pricing.

Currently, there is no annual family pass option, which limits flexibility for households seeking a bundled plan. Introducing a family membership, either as a flat-rate plan or a discounted bundle of individual passes, could improve affordability, increase convenience, and drive higher overall membership sales.

Community Room Use

The three community rooms at the GCC were collectively underutilized in 2024. Each room has an annual availability of 4,732 hours, totaling 14,196 hours across all three spaces. Actual use was approximately 5,128 hours, or 36 percent of capacity, leaving more than 60 percent of available time unused. This underutilization represents an opportunity to expand programming, schedule additional community activities, and increase rentals, transforming these spaces into more active and valuable resources for the community.

The Front Porch

The Front Porch is a welcoming, drop-in gathering space at the GCC designed to foster social connection and wellness for adults, particularly those 50 and older. Open weekdays from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m., the space offers a relaxed setting for coffee, conversation, and casual activities without the need for registration or Golden residency. Participants enjoy a variety of drop-in programs, including fitness classes, games, clubs, and special events, as well as social outings such as the popular Lunch Bunch gatherings. The Front Porch Friends group meets monthly to share ideas and shape future activities, ensuring programs remain community-driven. The center also supports wellness initiatives like SilverSneakers® and Renew Active®, reinforcing Golden’s commitment to providing inclusive, engaging opportunities for active adults.



Aquatics Facilities

Aquatic facilities, including swimming pools, splash pads, and other water-based amenities, are essential components of Golden’s recreation system. These facilities provide residents with opportunities for fitness, recreation, and social interaction while serving as popular destinations during the summer months.

Exceeding National Standards

According to NRPA 2024 Park Metric benchmarks, agencies serving populations of 20,000 to 49,000 typically provide:

- 1 pool per 27,801 residents
- 1 leisure pool per 32,812 residents

Golden significantly surpasses these standards, operating four pools for its population of approximately 21,000. These include a seasonal outdoor leisure and lap pool at The Splash along with two indoor pools at the GCC: one designed for lap swimming and the other for leisure. This equates to one pool for every 5,250 residents and one leisure pool for every 10,500 residents, far surpassing the typical offerings of peer agencies.

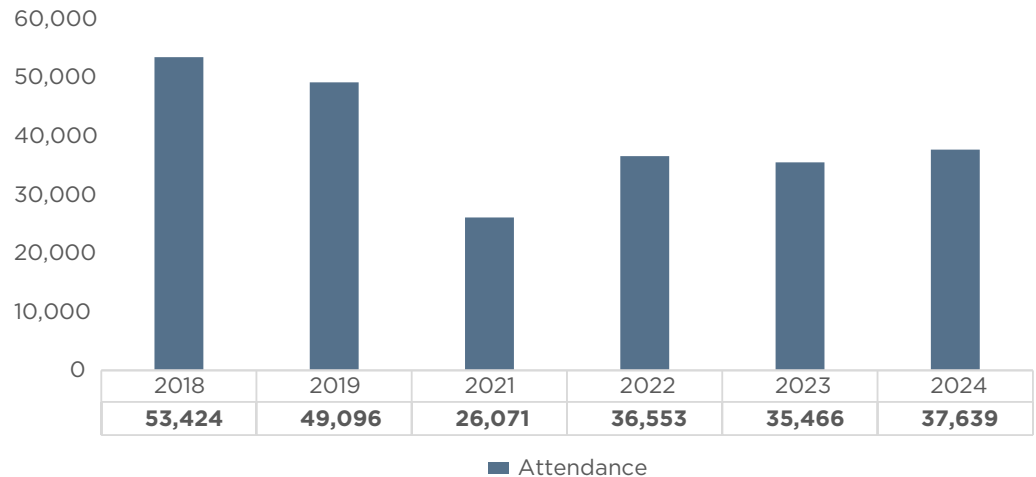
The Splash Performance and Future Needs

The Splash remains one of Golden’s most popular summer destinations and a cornerstone of outdoor recreation in the community. Opened in 2005, the facility typically operates from Memorial Day through Labor Day and offers a zero-depth-entry leisure pool, two large water slides, lap swimming areas, a diving well, a splash pad, interactive play features for children, a concession stand, and shaded seating.

After nearly two decades of continuous use, the facility is beginning to show its age and is due for guest amenity upgrades. The wear on existing features may be contributing to the decline in seasonal attendance, even as participation trends rebound from pandemic-related impacts.

Prior to the pandemic, annual attendance averaged more than 50,000 visits, with 53,424 visits in 2018 and 49,096 in 2019. Attendance fell sharply in 2021 to 26,071 following COVID-19 closures and restrictions. Participation has since rebounded to 36,553 visits in 2022, 35,466 in 2023, and 37,639 in 2024. While these numbers show steady recovery, attendance remains approximately 30% below pre-pandemic levels (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: The Splash Attendance (2018 – 2024)



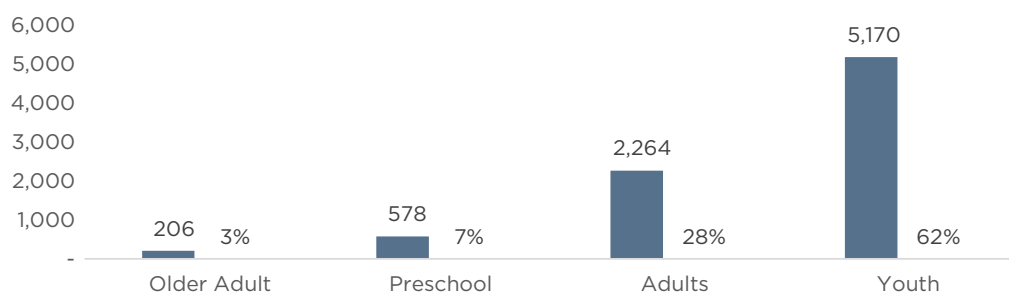
Age Group Registration

The Department offers recreation programs for a wide range of age groups:

- Preschool (0 – 4)
- Youth (5 – 17)
- Adults (18 – 49)
- Older Adults (50+)

Understanding participation by age helps evaluate how well program offerings align with community needs. Youth programs make up nearly half of all registrations, followed by adults, preschool-aged children, and older adults. Figure 7 illustrates registration by age group.

Figure 7: Registration by Age Group (2024)

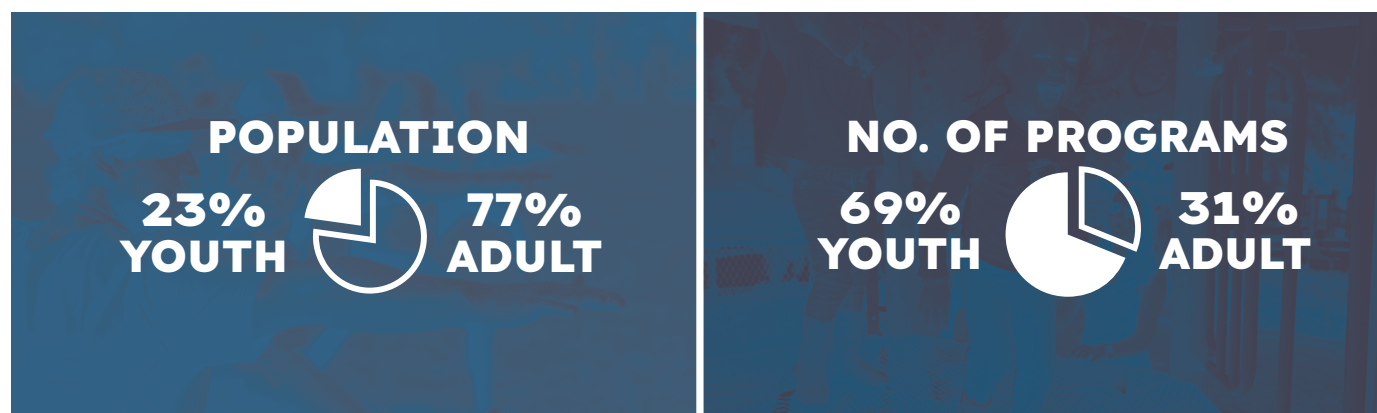


5.0 Programs that Connect

The current program menu places a strong emphasis on youth, with 69% of offerings designed for children and teens making up about 23% of Golden's population. This focus is common among park and recreation agencies and reflects the Department's role in supporting families and school-age participants. At the same time, adults represent roughly 77% of the population but are served by just 31% of fee-based programs that require registration, highlighting an opportunity to expand formal offerings for this group.

The Front Porch, a drop-in area within the GCC, adds value by fostering social connection and wellness among adults over 50 through unstructured activities and informal gatherings. Tracking participation in these offerings would help better understand their reach and inform future planning. While Figure 7 reflects participation in registered classes only, tracking drop-in participation would provide a fuller picture of overall reach and help guide future planning.

Figure 8: Population vs. Program Menu



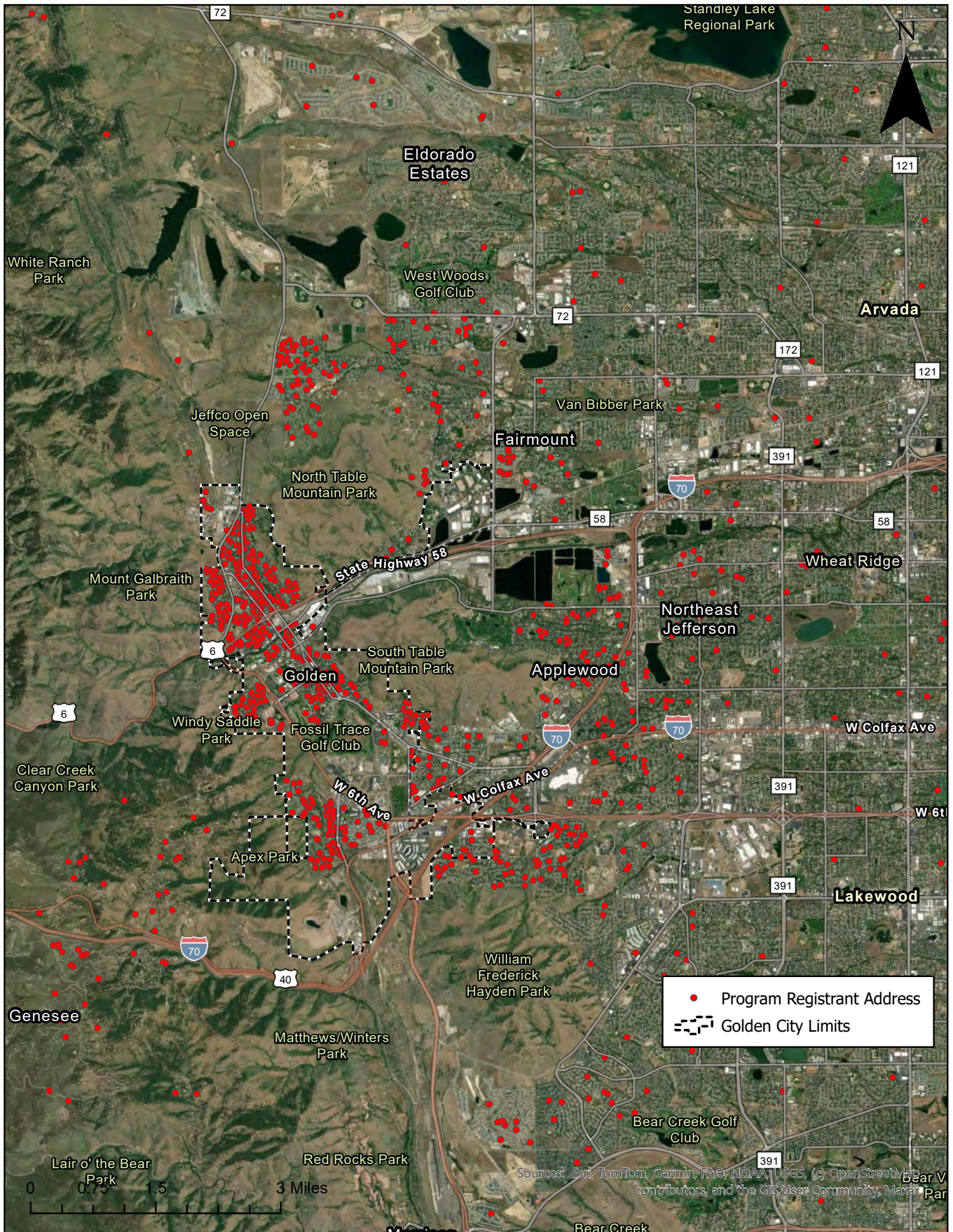
Geographic Reach

Program participation extends well beyond Golden's boundaries, demonstrating the broad regional appeal of the Golden's recreation offerings. Figure 9 illustrates the geographic distribution of households that participated in enrollment-based programs in 2024. Each dot represents a single household, regardless of how many programs were attended. The densest clustering of participants is near downtown and neighborhoods adjacent to the GCC. Participation also comes from nearby communities such as Arvada, Wheat Ridge, and Lakewood. The map highlights a significant regional reach, with households traveling from as far as Westminster, underscoring Golden's strong draw for recreation opportunities.

At the same time, participation is noticeably lower in Golden's southern neighborhoods near Heritage Road and the C-470 corridor. These areas tend to have lower household income, greater racial and ethnic diversity, and a lower median age, suggesting that barriers such as cost, transportation, or awareness may influence access to recreation programs.



Figure 9: Program Registration Origin (2024)



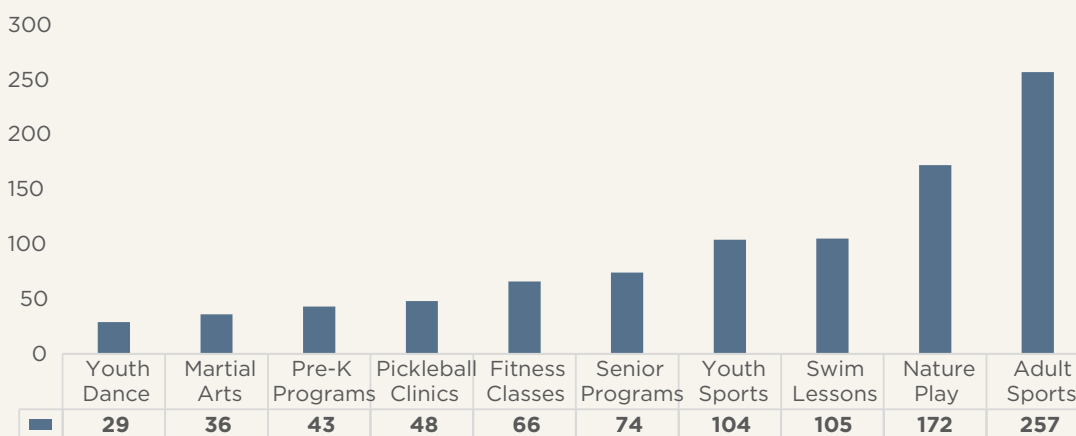
From Current Use to Future Priorities

The previous sections cover current program participation, facility use, and geographic reach. To build on this, the Department gathered community input to identify priority program areas for the future. Results from dot voting and the statistically valid survey provide a clear picture of where residents would like to see investment, helping connect today's participation patterns with tomorrow's priorities.

At community events, participants identified priority program areas through a dot voting exercise. Results highlighted strong interest in adult sports, nature play, swim lessons, and youth sports, reflecting demand for both youth development and adult wellness (see Figure 10).



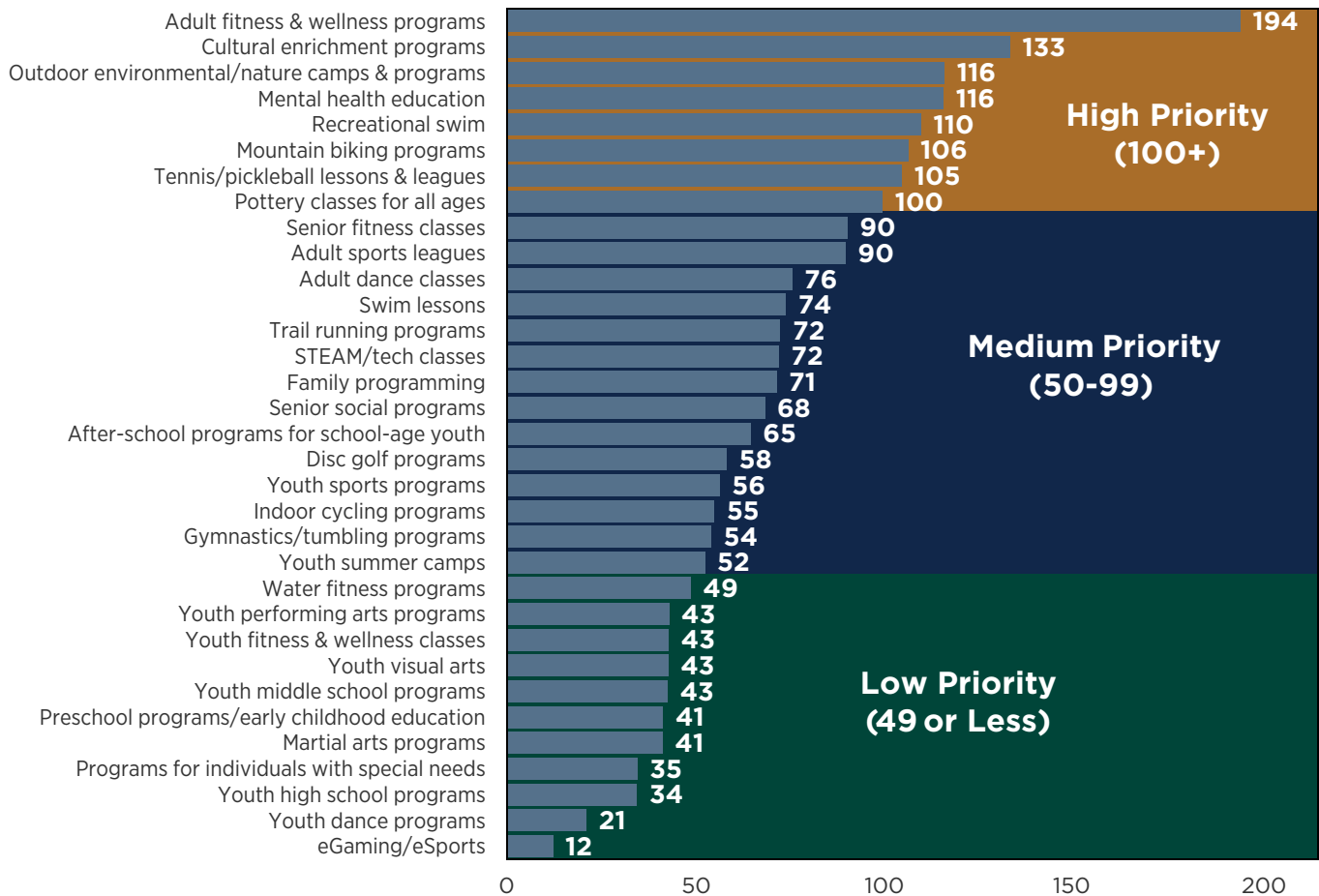
Figure 10: Dot Voting – Programs



The statistically valid survey further reinforced these priorities by asking residents to rate the importance of different program types. Several scored above 100, identifying them as high-priority areas for future investment (see Figure 11). These include adult fitness and wellness, cultural enrichment, outdoor/nature programs, mental health and stress reduction, recreational swim, mountain biking, tennis/pickleball, and pottery.

Figure 11: PIR – Programs

Top Priorities for Investment for Programs/Activities Based on Priority Investment Rating



Community engagement findings highlight where the Department can focus to better align programs with resident priorities. Adults emphasized a need for more fitness, wellness, and cultural enrichment opportunities, signaling an opportunity to expand beyond the Department's current youth-focused offerings. Aquatics also emerged as a top priority, with swim lessons and recreational swimming consistently ranking high across survey tools, suggesting expanded capacity is warranted at both the GCC and The Splash.

Creative outlets such as pottery and cultural arts scored well, reinforcing the importance of maintaining and growing programs that appeal to

all ages. Youth sports and nature play remain highly valued, confirming the role of these programs as a foundation for recreation in Golden. At the same time, participation patterns and geographic analysis point to barriers related to affordability and transportation, particularly in southern neighborhoods, indicating that new strategies to improve access are needed.

Finally, residents expressed interest in newer and emerging activities including mountain biking, pickleball, and programs tied to mental health and overall wellness. These findings underscore the importance of staying responsive and innovative as community needs evolve while also broadening the range of opportunities available for Golden residents.

6.0

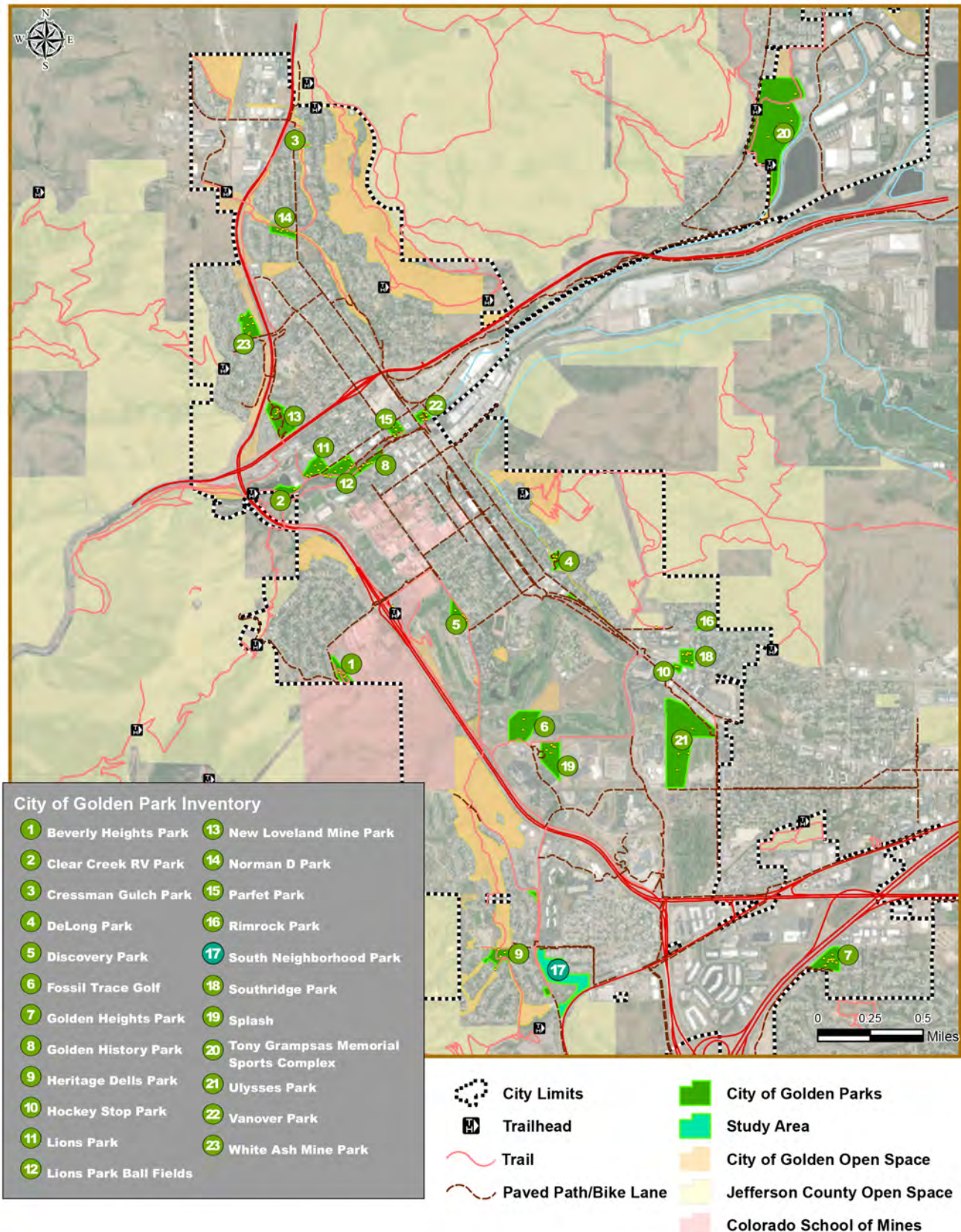
THE SPACES WE TREASURE



The Department oversees a diverse park and recreation system that combines Golden's scenic setting with a wide range of recreational opportunities. This chapter presents the park inventory and level of service analysis, which evaluates how well existing parks and facilities meet community needs today. The findings establish a baseline for measuring service levels, guiding future investments, and identifying opportunities for improvement when paired with community feedback.

Figure 12 provides a system inventory map that shows the relative size and distribution of existing parks and recreation facilities in Golden.

Figure 12: Park System Map



Park Condition Ratings

To better understand park conditions and guide future investment, each site was evaluated based on key amenity performance and core criteria that shape the user experience. For the purpose of this Plan, a park amenity refers to any built feature within a park that supports recreational use. Ratings considered the availability of supporting features such as restrooms, drinking fountains, seating, parking, and shade, which enhance comfort and accessibility.

None of Golden's evaluated parks received a Poor rating, indicating all sites meet a baseline level of quality and functionality.



GOOD

All key amenities such as picnic shelters, restrooms, playgrounds, and sport courts are present, well maintained, and functional. Facilities are clean, safe, and free from visible damage.



FAIR

Most amenities are present, but one or two amenities show signs of wear or need minor repairs. Facilities might lack modern features or experience occasional maintenance issues.



POOR

Multiple amenities are missing, non-functional, or in disrepair. Conditions might include outdated structures, safety concerns, or insufficient amenities.

Park Classifications

As a means of organizing Golden's parks and recreation facilities, sites are classified into a hierarchy that creates a system of interrelated facilities. Some facilities that meet neighborhood needs and have specialized amenities could be placed into more than one classification but are grouped here by their broadest role.

Table 5: Park Classifications

Classification	Count of Class	Approximate GIS Acres
Pocket Park	5	2.09
Neighborhood Park	11	43.21
Community Park	2	11.48
Special-Purpose Facility	5	271.74
Sports Complex	3	95.8
Study Area	1	26
GRAND TOTAL	26	470.32

Open Space Master Plan

In July 2025, Golden adopted Phase 2 of the Open Space Master Plan, ensuring that all 391 acres of City-owned open space—across 16 properties—are identified, classified, and managed within one guiding document. This adoption marks a significant step in protecting Golden's natural resources and defining their long-term stewardship. For additional context and direction on trail management, including oversight of social trails, refer to OSMP Phase 2, which outlines the City's Social Trails Management Policy and Open Space Development Policy.

Definition of Open Space

Those lands owned or acquired by the City of Golden, whose purpose is primarily conservation or preservation, and that are managed to maintain, improve, or adapt the ecological and/or historical integrity of the parcel, including the protection of native plants, wildlife habitats and ecosystems, for enjoyment by future generations."

POCKET PARKS

TOTALS  **5 PARKS**
 **2.09 ACRES**
 **8 AMENITIES**

Pocket parks are small, localized green spaces that provide some recreation opportunities for nearby residents. They are typically within a quarter mile of homes and can include benches, landscaping, small playgrounds, or gathering areas. Due to their size, they are not a substitute for larger neighborhood parks.

KEY FEATURES:

- Seating areas, shade, and landscaping
- Small play elements or interactive features
- Typically within residential developments
- No dedicated parking; designed for walk-up access

Facility	Park Condition	Approx. Acres	Amenity Count
Cressman Gulch Park	Fair	0.38	3
Rimrock Park	Fair	0.21	2
Ditch Park	Good	0.7	1
Eagle Ridge Greenway	Good	0.5	1
Triangle Park	Good	0.3	1



NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS

TOTALS



11 PARKS



43.21 ACRES



79 AMENITIES

Neighborhood parks are designed for nearby residents, providing space for recreation, play, and social activities. Ideally located within a half mile of homes, they serve as community gathering places and accommodate a range of ages and activities.

KEY FEATURES:

- Playgrounds, multipurpose fields, and courts
- Walking paths, shaded picnic areas, and seating
- Typically includes a mix of irrigated turf and natural landscaping
- Generally accessible by foot, bike, or neighborhood streets
- On-street parking is common; parking lots are discouraged

Facility	Park Condition	Approx. Acres	Amenity Count
Beverly Heights Park	Fair	3.58	6
Discovery Park	Good	2.52	6
DeLong Park	Good	1.60	5
Golden Heights Park	Good	7.19	12
Heritage Dells Park	Good	4.66	6
New Loveland Mine Park	Fair	7.72	5
Norman D. Park	Good	2.83	7
Parfet Park	Good	2.23	7
Southridge Park	Good	3.52	9
Vanover Park	Fair	1.64	7
White Ash Mine Park	Fair	5.72	9



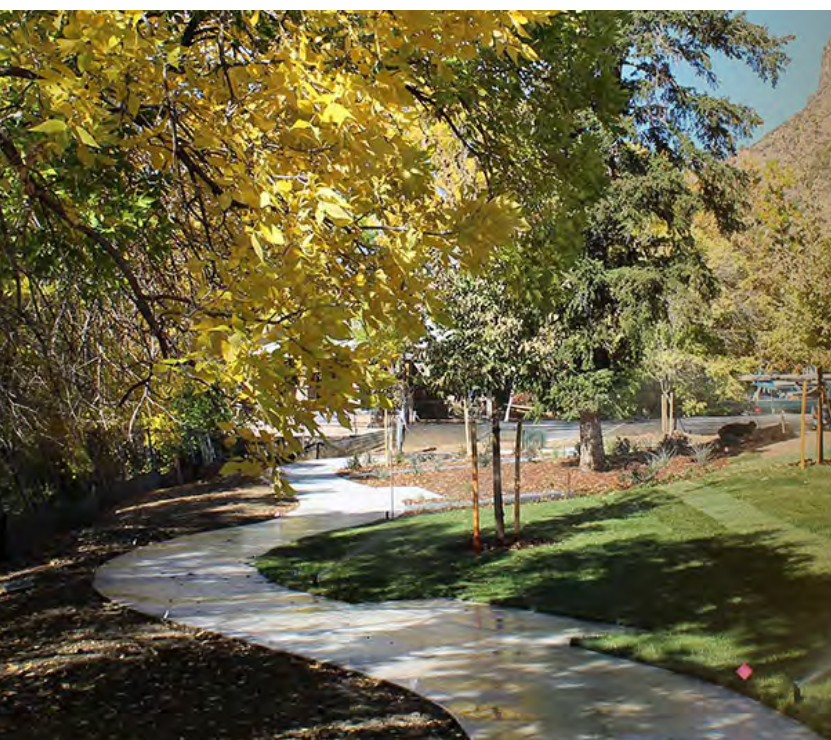
DeLong Park

Golden's First Organic Park

DeLong Park stands out as Golden's first fully organic park, a bold step toward sustainable land care. Free from synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, the park is a living example of how community spaces can be both beautiful and environmentally responsible.

At the heart of this effort are the Weedbusters, a dedicated group of volunteers who meet regularly

to hand-pull invasive species and care for the native landscape. Their work not only keeps the park healthy but builds community pride and environmental stewardship. DeLong Park is not just a place to play—it's a place where Golden comes together to protect pollinators, restore habitat, and lead by example.



In July 2024, Golden partnered with Natural Grocers and Beyond Pesticides through the Parks for a Sustainable Future Program to pilot organic land management practices at DeLong Park, New Loveland Mine Park, and Southridge Park. These demonstration sites are part of a nationwide effort to shift away from synthetic weed killers and pesticides toward practices that improve soil health, reduce water use, and create safer green spaces for children, families, and pets. By adopting organic land management, Golden is not only enhancing community health and recreation but also supporting biodiversity and contributing to climate change mitigation.

COMMUNITY PARKS

TOTALS



2 PARKS



.11.48 ACRES



24 AMENITIES

Community parks are larger parks that provide a mix of programmed sports facilities and open turf for a broad range of community activities. These parks often serve as regional destinations, incorporating features that support both active and passive recreation.

KEY FEATURES:

- Sports fields, courts, and event spaces
- Walking trails, gardens, and natural features
- Amphitheaters, festival areas, or historical elements
- Located along major roads for easy access
- Designed to accommodate a variety of recreational needs

Facility	Park Condition	Approx. Acres	Amenity Count
Lions Park (incl. Whitewater Park)	Good	4.38	8
Lions Park Ball Fields	Fair	7.10	16



Clear Creek Whitewater Community Park

Clear Creek Whitewater Park, part of Lions Park, is one of Golden's most distinctive recreational attractions. Located at the west end of 10th Street, the course runs through Downtown Golden and was built for kayaking and canoeing. The original 800-foot course, constructed with natural boulders, featured three sections: an upper area with drops and pools for varying skill levels, a middle section with surf waves and course gates, and a lower section with more challenging drops. In 2002, six additional drop structures were added downstream behind city hall and near the Washington Street Bridge, extending the course to seven city blocks. A small amphitheater near the visitors center provides a prime viewing spot for this popular waterway.

SPORTS COMPLEXES

TOTALS  **3 COMPLEXES**  **.95.8 ACRES**  **33 AMENITIES**

Sports complexes are parks dedicated primarily to organized sports, offering high-quality facilities for leagues, tournaments, and recreational play. These complexes can include specialized sports fields, courts, or skating areas and are designed to fill service gaps for specific athletic needs.

KEY FEATURES:

- Baseball, softball, soccer fields, tennis courts, and skate parks
- Stadium seating, lighting, and concession areas
- Limited passive recreation features
- Located away from residential areas to minimize noise and traffic impacts

Facility	Park Condition	Approx. Acres	Amenity Count
Hockey Stop Park	Good	1.05	6
Tony Grampsas Memorial Sports Complex	Good	60.04	10
Ulysses Sports Complex	Good	34.71	17



Ulysses Sports Complex

Ulysses Sports Complex is one of Golden's premier recreation destinations, offering athletic fields, a popular 21,500 square foot skate park, a dog park, playground, picnic pavilion, and trails. The City is reinvesting more than \$9 million to upgrade and expand the park, including new multi-use fields, improved parking and drainage, expanded dog park areas, and updated playgrounds and shelters. With phased improvements underway through 2026, Ulysses is being transformed into a modern, versatile complex that will continue to serve as a hub for sports, recreation, and community life in Golden.

SPECIAL-PURPOSE FACILITIES

TOTALS



5 FACILITIES



271.74 ACRES



69 AMENITIES

These are parks designed to support a specific community purpose, such as cultural, environmental, or recreational needs. These spaces can feature golf courses, aquatic centers, civic plazas, camping facilities, or other specialized amenities tailored to their intended use.

KEY FEATURES:

- Can include nature preserves, urban plazas, or historical sites
- Often designed around a specific theme or use
- May be standalone or part of a larger park system
- Location and size vary based on purpose

Facility	Park Condition	Approx. Acres	Amenity Count
Clear Creek RV Park	Good	2.42	34
Fossil Trace Golf Club	Good	202	23
Golden History Park	Good	2.36	6
The Splash	Good	7.96	6
Golden Cemetery	Good	57	N/A

Fossil Trace Golf Club

Fossil Trace Golf Club is one of Golden’s most distinctive community assets and a nationally recognized destination. Nestled at the base of the foothills on a 202 acre site, the course is celebrated for its dramatic setting, striking views, and the rare opportunity to play among preserved dinosaur tracks and other geologic features. Since opening in 2003, it has consistently ranked as one of Colorado’s premier public courses, drawing residents and visitors alike for both recreation and tourism.

The facility’s scale and performance illustrate its regional significance. Fossil Trace hosts approximately 50,000 rounds annually, including 40,000 eighteen hole rounds and 10,000 nine hole rounds, and generates more than 7 million dollars in annual revenue, with green fees alone exceeding 4 million dollars. Over the past five years, total revenues have grown by nearly 60 percent,



positioning Fossil Trace as a top performing eighteen hole public course in Colorado.

Beyond the course itself, Fossil Trace has built a robust player development program, serving 450 junior participants and 165 adults each year, with the popular “Ready for Golf” program alone attracting 385 participants and maintaining a 50 person waitlist.

Together, these statistics demonstrate how Fossil Trace combines recreation, tourism, history, and economic impact, making it a signature amenity that sets Golden apart from its peers.

STUDY AREA

Lands that have been acquired or annexed but lack a finalized management designation. These areas are in transition and require additional study, community input, and planning before determining their long-term role within the system.

KEY FEATURES:

- Newly acquired, undeveloped, or transitional parcels
- Subject to research and planning before assigning a permanent classification
- May become open space or parkland based on community needs and conservation priorities

EXAMPLE: The South Neighborhood Property, a six-acre parcel annexed in 2023 through a land exchange with Jefferson County, is planned to combine with adjacent parcels to create a 20-acre site. Its future use will reflect community priorities while honoring the property's legacy.

Amenity Scoring

The assessment evaluated 217 outdoor recreation amenities across Golden's park system, including playgrounds, picnic shelters, athletic fields, and courts. Results show most amenities are in good visible condition and meet community expectations.

Score	Golden	National
0 – Nonfunctioning	0%	3%
1 – Below Expectations	7%	10%
2 – Meets Expectations	88%	79%
3 – Exceeds Expectations	5%	8%

Several playgrounds need replacement due to aging equipment, limited play value, and outdated sand or gravel surfacing:

- Cressman Gulch Park: Small playground on gravel
- New Loveland Mine Park: Small playground on sand
- White Ash Mine Park: Aging playground on sand
- Lion Park: Aging playground
- Tony Grampas Memorial Sports Complex: Aging playground

Modern playground standards call for unitary rubber or engineered wood fiber surfacing to improve fall safety, ADA accessibility, and maintenance efficiency. The continued use of sand and gravel limits accessibility for strollers, wheelchairs, and young children and requires more frequent maintenance to control debris and compaction.

The assessment focused on visible features and did not fully capture aging infrastructure such as irrigation, stormwater, electrical, or mechanical systems. These hidden assets drive future reinvestment needs and will require targeted capital funding to prevent growing maintenance backlogs.

Aging Irrigation Systems in Older Parks

In many older park systems, irrigation infrastructure is one of the most common sources of deferred maintenance. Issues often include:

- Leaking or corroded mainlines that waste water and drive up utility costs
- Outdated controllers without modern technology like smart sensors or central management
- Inconsistent water coverage leading to turf damage, bare spots, or overwatering
- Limited drought adaptability with systems not designed for water restrictions or efficiency upgrades

Addressing these challenges through system assessments, modernization plans, and phased replacements can significantly reduce long-term costs and improve sustainability across the park system.



Trails Inventory

A trail is a designated linear path or corridor—natural or paved—intended for walking, hiking, biking, or other forms of non-motorized recreation and transportation. Trails may be located within parks, open space, or natural areas and serve to connect people with destinations, nature, and neighborhoods.

Trails are one of Golden’s most valued community assets, providing opportunities for recreation, fitness, and active transportation while linking neighborhoods, schools, employment centers, and natural areas. The Department manages 27 miles of trails, complemented by 26 additional miles managed by Jefferson County Open Space (JCOS) within Golden’s boundaries. Together, these networks create seamless connections between Golden parks, regional destinations, and the surrounding foothills.

JCOS manages more than approximately 57,000 acres of land and 269 miles of trails across the county, bringing significant expertise in planning, maintenance, and visitor management. Their resources and experience make JCOS a strong partner for the Department as Golden looks to enhance connectivity, improve trail maintenance, and ensure a consistent, high-quality experience across local and regional systems.

Survey findings reinforce the central role of trails in Golden’s system. Residents identified multiuse soft surface trails (PIR=157) as the highest priority facility investment, followed closely by multiuse paved trails (PIR=137). This clear community preference underscores the importance of maintaining and enhancing both trail types to meet recreation needs, support sustainable transportation, and preserve Golden’s strong identity as an outdoor-oriented community.

Golden first adopted a Bicycle Master Plan in 2003 to guide development of a citywide bicycle system and strengthen regional linkages. This vision has since been advanced through the Pedestrian & Bicycle Master Plan (2023), which establishes updated priorities for improving connectivity, expanding multimodal travel options, and working to ensure access throughout the community.

Table 6 provides an inventory of Golden’s trail system, highlighting both Golden and JCOS trails, their approximate lengths, access points, and key connections.

For additional context and detailed guidance on the management of trails on open space and the oversight of social trails, refer to OSMP Phase Two, which outlines the City’s Social Trails Management Policy and Open Space Development Policy.

Table 6: Trails Inventory

Trail Name	Length	Location / Connection	Access Points / Parking
Golden Trails			
19th Street/Lookout Mountain Route	2.0	CSM to Lookout Mountain Road, high-use bike and recreation route	19th Street west of Highway 6
Clear Creek Trail	1.6	Links neighborhoods, schools, GCC, downtown, New Loveland Mine, and White Ash Mine Parks	Pedestrian overpass at Highway 93; multiple neighborhood connections
Cressman Gulch Trail	0.6	Ford Street and Mesa Drive to Highway 93; connects to Tucker Gulch and Clear Creek Trails	Ford Street and Mesa Drive near Norman D. Park
Fairmount Trail	3.0	Connects Golden to Fairmount neighborhoods and trails	Various access points along eastern Golden
Grant Terry Trail	0.7	Along Clear Creek west of Clear Creek RV Park	Connected to Clear Creek Trail near RV Park
Highway 6 Trail	2.5	Johnson Road to 19th Street; planned connection to Clear Creek Trail	Ends at 19th Street with bike route connections
Highway 93 Trail	1.9	Iowa Street north to Tucker Gulch; connects to New Loveland Mine Park and Magpie Gulch Trail	Multiple connections along Highway 93
Johnson Road Bikeway	1.5	Shared-use path along Johnson Road corridor	Trailheads along Johnson Road corridor
Johnson Road Trail	2.0	South Golden Road to Highway 6 Trail	Intersection of South Golden Road and Ford Street
Kinney Run Trail	0.75	Heritage Square to the 6th Avenue/Tripp Ranch area via Heritage Dells Park	Heritage Square parking lot off Highway 40
Lubahn Trail	2.5	Below Castle Rock on South Table Mountain	Belvedere Drive and 19th Street
Magpie Gulch Trail	0.8	Canyon Point to schools, GCC, and downtown; includes Highway 93 overpass	Multiple neighborhood access points
Northeast Corporate Center Trail	0.5	Along McIntyre and West 50th Avenue near Coors Technology Center	Parking on West 50th Avenue
Olivine Trail	0.5	Neighborhood trail linking into downtown Golden	Local neighborhood connections

Trail Name	Length	Location / Connection	Access Points / Parking
Tony Gramscas Trail	1.3	Along west side of park, following Church Ditch	Salvia Street, Easley Road, and West 50th Avenue
Triceratops Trail	1.5	Interpretive trail near Fossil Trace Golf Course and CSM campus	Trailhead near Fossil Trace Golf Course
Tucker Gulch Trail	1.5	Vanover Park to Norman D. Park via old rail bed	Vanover Park
West 44th Avenue Trail	1.8	Shared-use path along West 44th Avenue corridor	Trailheads along West 44th Avenue corridor
JCOS Trails			
Apex Trail	2.3	Heritage Square to Lookout Mountain Drive, popular for hiking and biking	Lower Heritage Square parking lot off Highway 93
Chimney Gulch Trail	3.5	Highway 6 to Lookout Mountain Nature Center	Lookout Mountain Road; roadside parking on Highway 6
Golden Cliffs Trail	4	Trail to Golden Cliffs climbing area, hiking only	South end of Peery Drive; restroom at parking area
Nightbird Gulch Trail	1.8	To Mount Galbraith Park, hiking only	Valley View Court and Canyon Point Circle
North Table Mountain Trail	15	Southwest side of North Table Mountain, multiple volunteer-built sections	Peery Drive (north, middle, and south points)



Level of Service

To evaluate the Department's level of service (LOS), the availability, quantity, and accessibility of parks and amenities across Golden were analyzed. This assessment integrates the system inventory with GIS mapping to illustrate park distribution throughout Golden.

Benchmark Analysis

The NRPA benchmarks provide a useful framework for assessing parkland availability relative to population size. Golden's park system encompasses 366 acres in total, including the 202-acre Fossil Trace Golf Club. Because the golf course is not open for public use, LOS calculations are based on 164 acres, providing 7.8 acres per 1,000 residents. This is below the NRPA median benchmark of 11.2 acres per 1,000 for communities of similar size. However, Golden compares favorably to most benchmarked Colorado agencies, exceeding Englewood (4.3 acres per 1,000), Erie (4.4), Wheat Ridge (5.2), and Windsor (5.8). Only Louisville provides more parkland at 16.7 acres per 1,000 residents.

This shortfall is offset by Golden's unique geography and partnerships. The area is surrounded by open space and parks managed by neighboring municipalities, providing additional opportunities for outdoor recreation and connectivity. Additionally, the Clear Creek Trail, a vital natural corridor, runs approximately two miles through Golden and links Lions Park, Vanover Park, Clear Creek Whitewater Park, Parfet Park, and Golden History Park. This interconnected network of parks, trails, and open space greatly expands recreation opportunities beyond traditional parkland, helping to ensure residents have ample access to outdoor activity despite lower designated park acreage.

Golden meets or exceeds the NRPA median for the 10 most common park amenities, including playgrounds, sports fields, courts, dog parks, and skateparks. These metrics, summarized in Table 7, provide a benchmark for comparison but are not universal standards, as each community has unique needs and priorities. Overall, Golden offers a strong mix of recreational amenities.

Table 7: Park Metric Analysis

Types of Facilities	% of Agencies Offering This Facility	Median Number of Residents Per Facility	Golden Quantity	Golden Residents Per Facility	Needed to Meet NRPA Median 2024
Playground	93%	3,105	15	1,387	0
Diamond Field	85%	3,007	7	2,973	0
Basketball Court	84%	7,501	7	2,973	0
Rectangular Field	83%	3,333	8	2,601	0
Tennis Court	72%	5,461	5	4,162	0
Dog Park	68%	27,508	2	10,404	0
Skateboard Park	46%	33,167	2	10,404	0
Pickleball Court	42%	7,737	10	2,081	0
Volleyball Court	23%	14,208	1	20,080	0
Splashpad	23%	30,629	1	10,404	0



Walkability Analysis

The NRPA's 10-minute walk metric is a widely recognized benchmark that recommends all residents live within a 10-minute walk (approximately 0.5 miles) of a park or green space. This standard promotes equitable access to recreation and nature for all community members.

Pedestrian barriers, such as highways, major streets, railroads, and natural features like rivers, impact walkable access. Figure 13 denotes zones created by pedestrian barriers; these areas are accessible without crossing a major street or obstacle.

Figure 14 illustrates walkable access to outdoor recreation in Golden, using a 10-minute walk (0.5-mile) service area while accounting for pedestrian barriers. Darker orange areas indicate greater access to parks, while unshaded areas fall outside the 10-minute walk range. This analysis helps assess the distribution of parks and the equity of access across the community. Most residents (77%) can reach outdoor recreation within 10 minutes, reflecting well-distributed park resources.

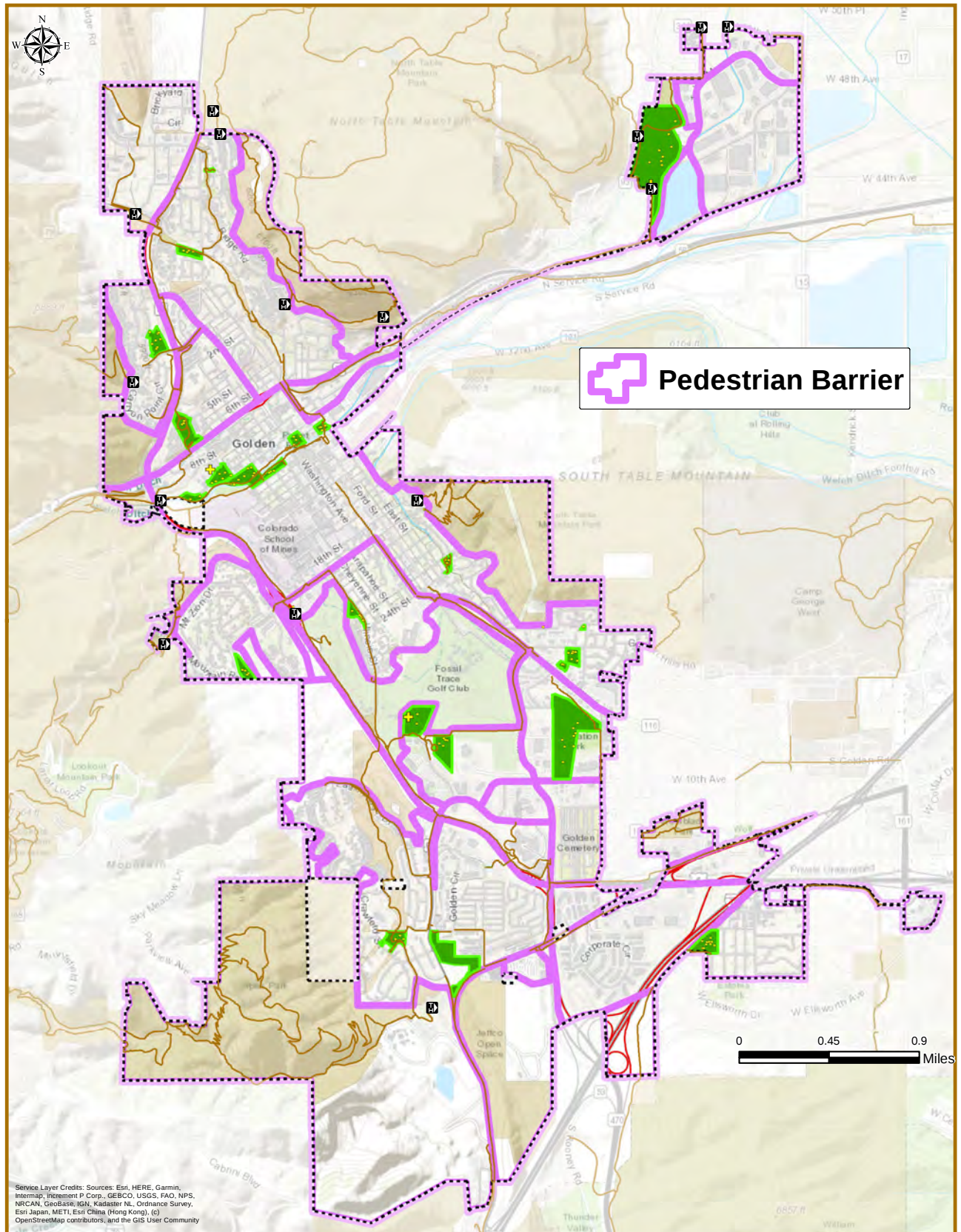
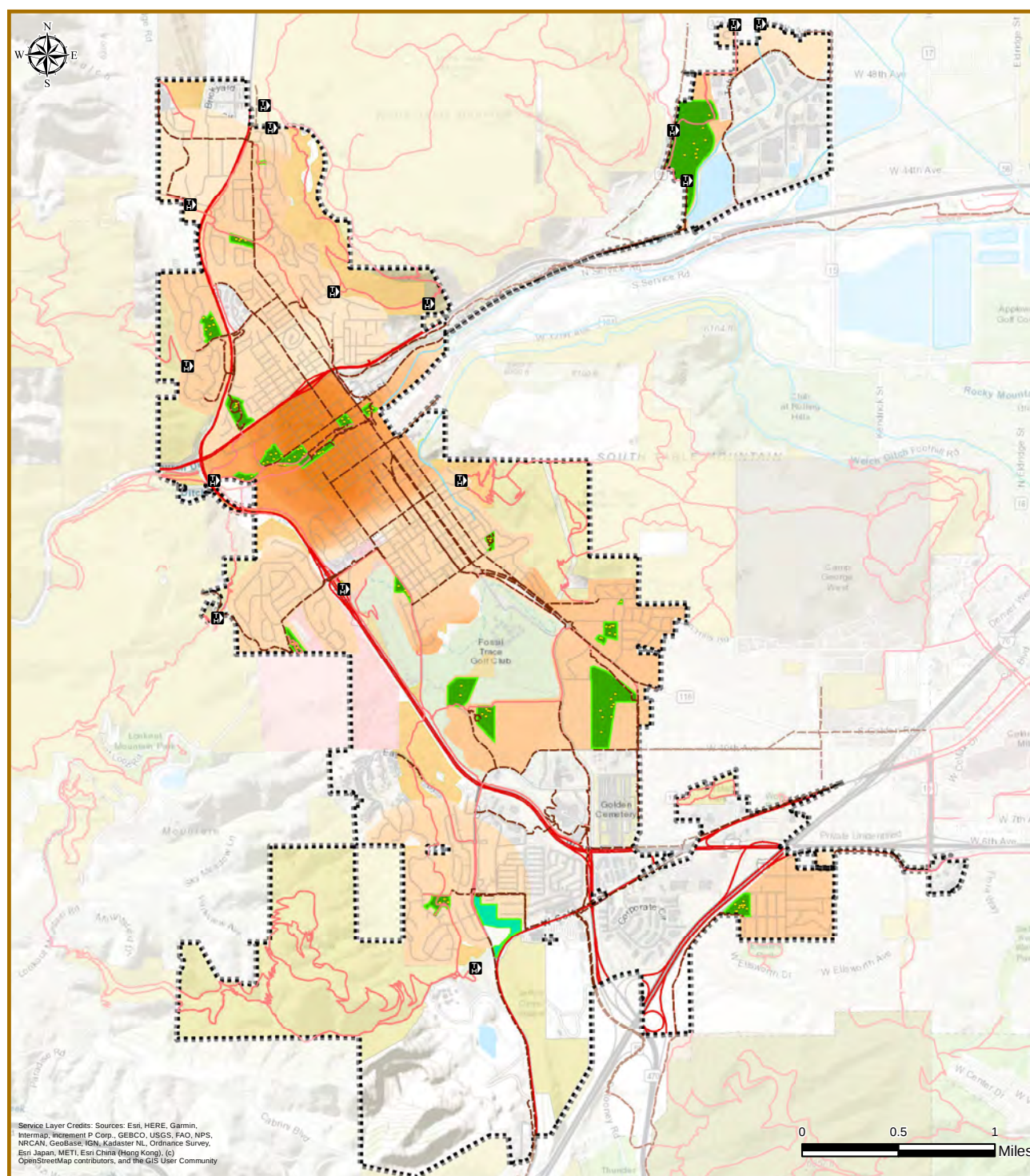
Figure 13: Pedestrian Barriers


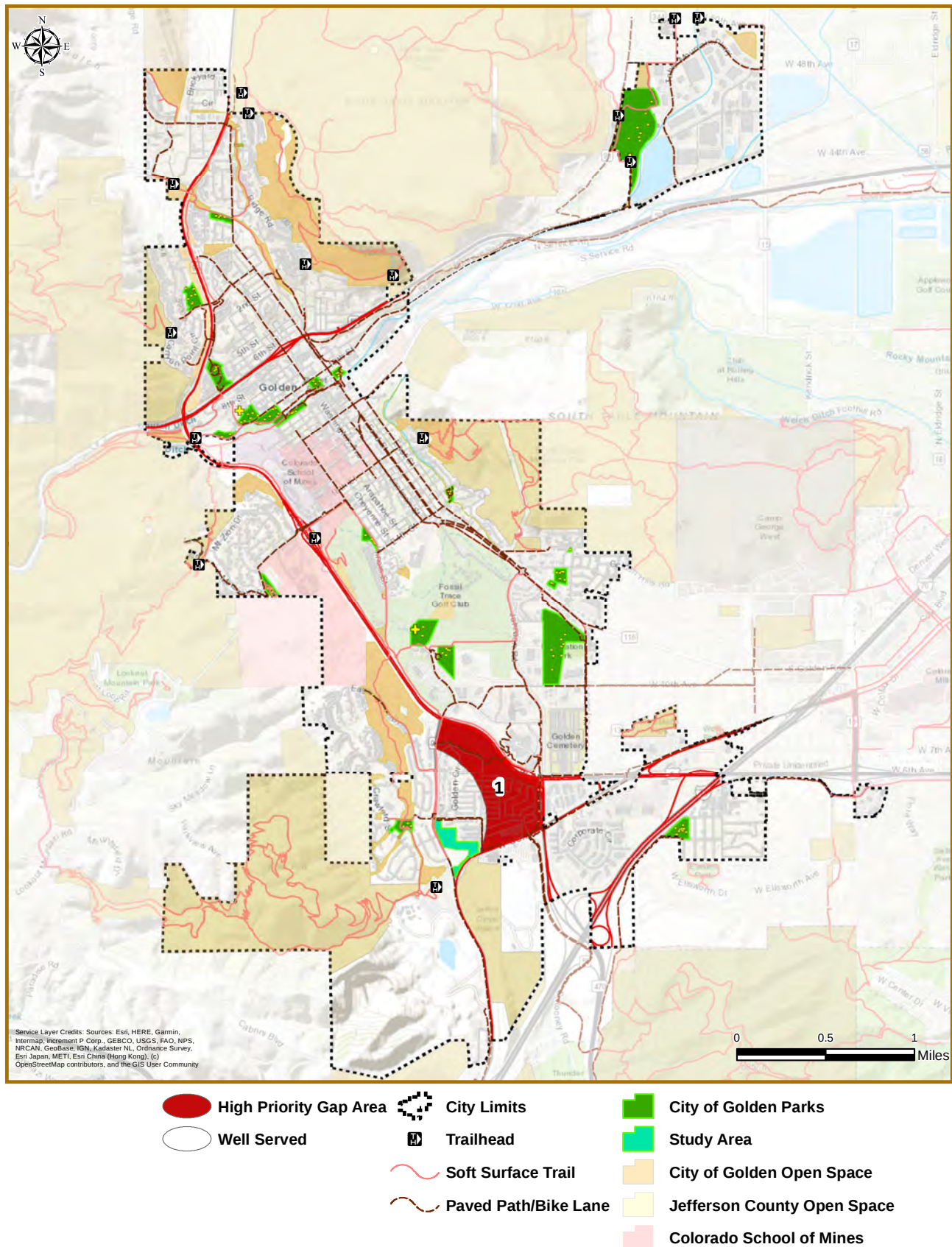
Figure 14: Walkable Access to Parks



- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| Greater Access | City Limits | City of Golden Parks |
| Some Access | Trailhead | Study Area |
| Limited Access | Soft Surface Trail | City of Golden Open Space |
| No Walkable Service Within 1/2 Mile | Paved Path/Bike Lane | Jefferson County Open Space |
| | | Colorado School of Mines |

Gap Analysis

Figure 15: Gaps in Walkable Access



Areas without walkable 10-minute access were further analyzed. Zones without population data were excluded from this evaluation. Figure 15 highlights one primary populated area that lacks walkable access to outdoor recreation.

The area includes nearly 2,700 residents, with housing consisting of a mobile home community and several apartment complexes along the southern edge of Golden near U.S. Highway 6. This area is geographically constrained by major transportation

corridors, which limits pedestrian connections to existing parks and trails. The lack of sidewalks and street crossings further compounds these barriers, making it difficult to reach nearby open space or municipal parks.

Strategic investment in this area, such as developing a neighborhood park or improving trail connections, would greatly enhance quality of life for residents who currently face the greatest challenges in accessing outdoor spaces.

From Current System to Future Priorities

The previous sections describe Golden’s current park conditions, classifications, LOS, and geographic access. To complement this snapshot of existing system performance, the Department also engaged the community to understand which types of facilities and spaces should be emphasized in the future.

At community events, participants identified facility priorities through a dot voting exercise. Results highlighted strong support for aquatics and youth play

spaces, as well as interest in trails and gathering places that bring residents together (see Figure 14).

The statistically valid survey further reinforced these priorities by asking residents to rate the importance of different facility types. Several scored above 100, identifying them as high-priority areas for future investment (see Figure 15). These include multiuse soft surface trails, paved trails, the GCC, and an outdoor amphitheater or performing arts venue.

Figure 14: Dot Voting – Facilities

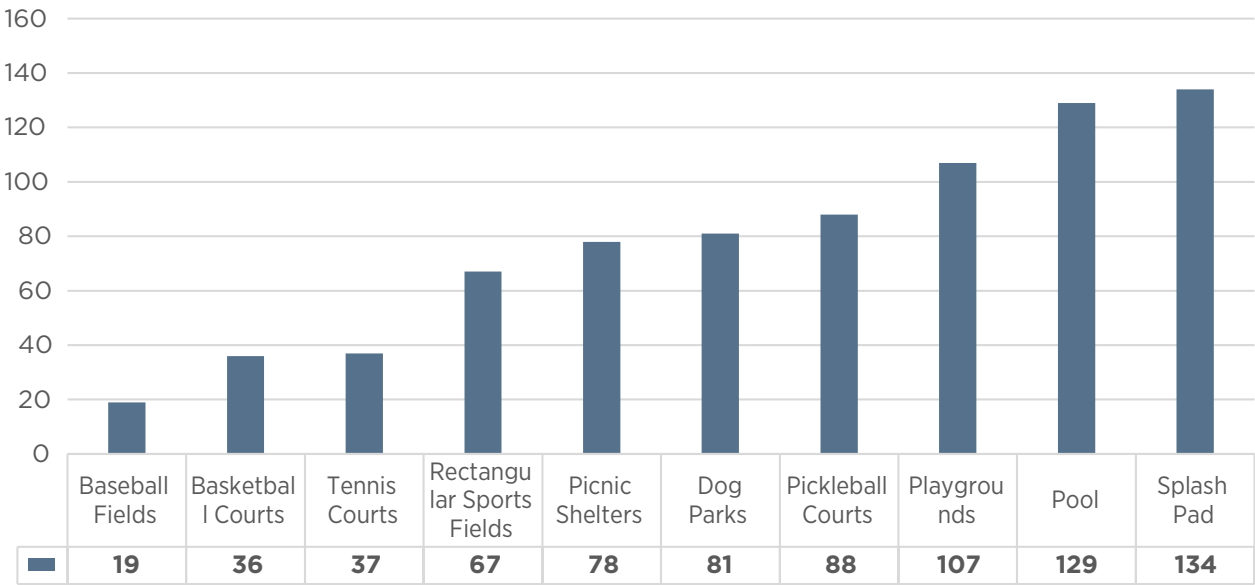
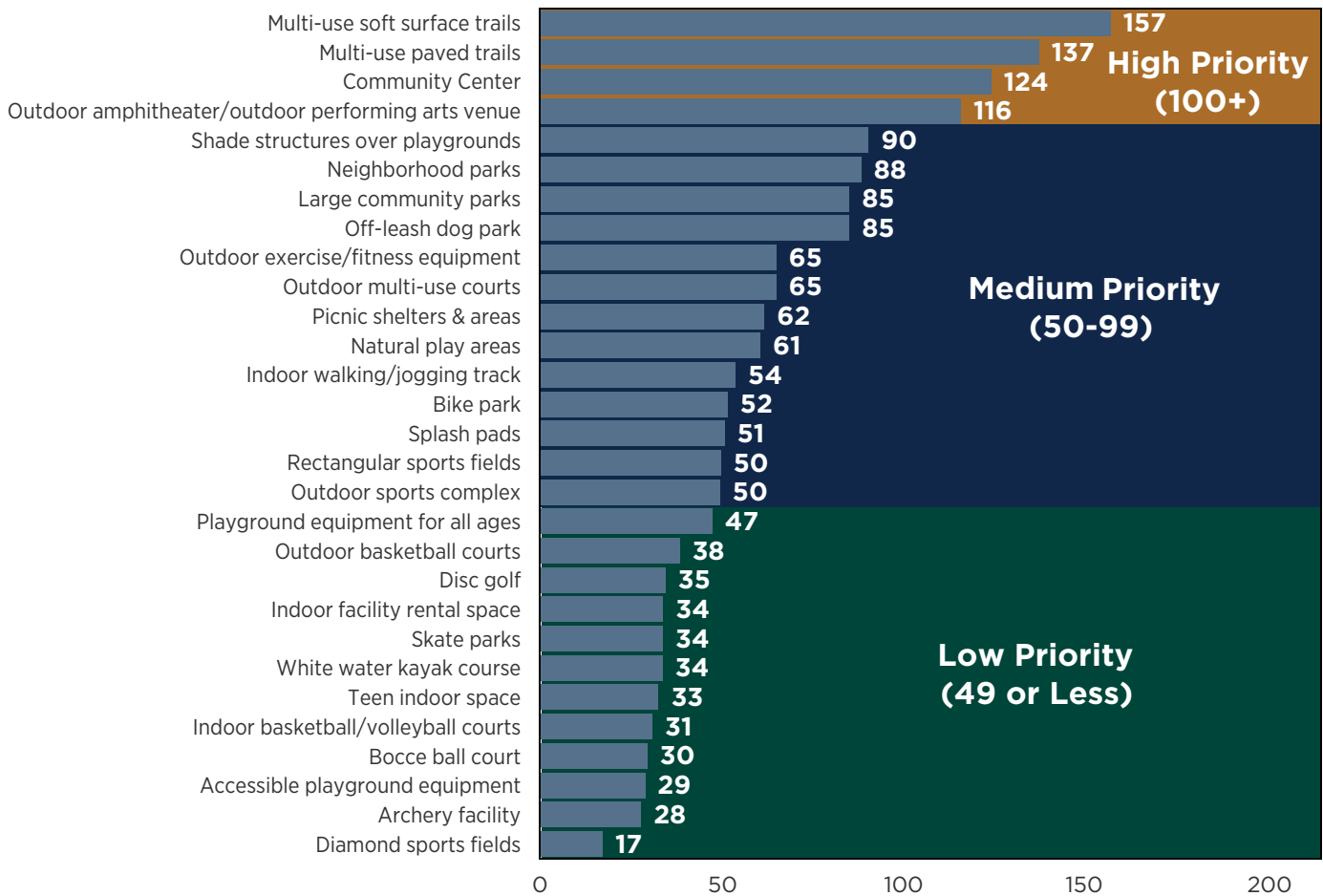


Figure 15: PIR – Facilities

Top Priorities for Investment for Facilities/Amenities Based on Priority Investment Rating



Community engagement findings highlight where the Department can focus to better align facilities with resident priorities. Trails emerged as the top priority across engagement tools, confirming their role as a defining feature of Golden's outdoor lifestyle and identity. Aquatics facilities also scored highly, with participants consistently identifying swimming opportunities as a key area of need. Expanded gathering spaces, both indoor and outdoor, were emphasized through support for the community center

and interest in an amphitheater or performance venue, signaling a strong demand for social and cultural connection.

Taken together, these results underscore the importance of maintaining a balanced system that continues to provide neighborhood-level amenities while also investing in destination facilities that strengthen Golden's unique sense of place.

7.0

WHAT WE DISCOVERED



Findings in this section reflect what was heard from residents, stakeholders, and staff, paired with facility, program, and organizational data. Together, they show how Golden's strong commitment to, inclusive, and community-centered services continues to enrich quality of life while pointing to new opportunities for growth.

Findings At A Glance

The findings tell a story of momentum. Golden has a well-respected parks and recreation system that is trusted by the community and closely tied to Golden's identity. They also reveal opportunities to expand programming for adults, strengthen access to aquatics, reinvest in aging facilities, and address equity in park access. Together, these priorities position Golden to advance its vision of being recognized as a national leader in high-quality parks, programs, and recreation facilities.

Engaged Community, Strong Support

TODAY'S REALITY: Residents are highly connected to Golden's parks and recreation system, with 97% reporting facility use and 94% expressing satisfaction with quality. More than 2,500 interactions across engagements reaffirmed the strong role parks, trails, and recreation play in daily life.

EMERGING PRESSURE: While satisfaction is high, residents voiced consistent concerns about aging facilities, limited adult programming, and the need for clearer communication and stronger staffing.

IMPLICATIONS: Sustaining satisfaction will require attention to facility reinvestment, programming balance, and ongoing community dialogue as expectations evolve.

Broad System, Lean Resources

TODAY'S REALITY: Golden provides a wide range of services, including parks, trails, aquatics, golf, cultural sites, and the GCC, supported by a lean staffing model and a moderate per capita spending level of \$284.

EMERGING PRESSURE: Rising visitation, including more than 630,000 annual park visits across just seven locations, places strain on staffing and operational resources. Compared to peer communities, Golden maintains higher parkland per capita but with fewer staff, increasing pressure on workloads and maintenance.

IMPLICATIONS: Without added resources, service quality will be increasingly difficult to sustain.

Leveraging Technology, Limiting Integration

TODAY'S REALITY: Golden has invested in multiple technology platforms—RecTrac for program registration, WebTMA for facility systems, and Cartegraph for park assets. Together, these tools have the capacity to support advanced reporting, life cycle planning, and proactive maintenance. At the RV Park RecTrac is also used for reservations, but it lacks functionality for park-specific needs such as dynamic site mapping, variable pricing, or integrated waitlist management.

EMERGING PRESSURE: Inconsistent use across workgroups, limited integration between systems, gaps in functionality, and accessibility challenges prevent Golden from realizing the full value of these investments. For example, RecTrac reporting is limited by inconsistent program setup, campground reservations require manual workarounds, and asset management data remains siloed rather than shared across platforms and the system does not fully meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) standards for accessibility or user-friendly design.

IMPLICATIONS: Technology can significantly improve efficiency and decision-making across the entire system, but greater consistency in data entry, stronger integration between platforms, and tools better suited to park-specific operations are needed to maximize benefits.

Program Strengths, Adult Gaps

TODAY'S REALITY: In 2024, the Department delivered more than 1,000 programs, including strong participation in camps, aquatics, and dance.

EMERGING PRESSURE: Offerings remain heavily weighted toward youth, leaving adults, who make up 77% of Golden's population, comparatively underserved.

IMPLICATIONS: Without a more balanced program mix, Golden risks missing opportunities to engage a large share of its adult population, expand cost recovery through higher-demand offerings, and ensure facilities are used to their full potential throughout the day and year.

Aquatics Demand, Uneven Capacity

TODAY'S REALITY: Golden's aquatic facilities include four pools, with The Splash serving as a popular regional destination and the GCC offering year-round swimming. Aquatics consistently rank among the top program priorities in community engagement.

EMERGING PRESSURE: Attendance at The Splash has declined in recent years, and many of the facility's guest amenities are nearing the end of their useful life. At the same time, the GCC pool is often over capacity, limiting opportunities for swimming lessons, fitness classes, and recreational use.

IMPLICATIONS: Without reinvestment at The Splash and operational changes to balance demand across facilities, aging amenities and uneven capacity could erode user satisfaction and limit the ability of Golden's aquatics system to meet community expectations.

Centralized Program Access, Geographic Gaps

TODAY'S REALITY: The GCC anchors most of the Department's programs, serving as the primary hub for fitness, aquatics, and recreation opportunities.

EMERGING PRESSURE: Residents in southern Golden have lower registration rates and face barriers to participating in programs concentrated at the GCC. Geographic challenges, including distance, and highways further limit access to programs outside their immediate neighborhoods.

IMPLICATION: Concentrating most programs at the GCC creates uneven participation across Golden and highlights a geographic gap in service delivery for southern neighborhoods.

Quality Facilities, Reinvestment Needs

TODAY'S REALITY: Golden provides a high-quality park and recreation system, but limited capital improvement funding and short-term planning cycles make it difficult to address aging infrastructure in a strategic way.

EMERGING PRESSURE: Several playgrounds, irrigation systems, the GCC, and The Splash are aging and would benefit from targeted upgrades to improve functionality, efficiency, and the overall user experience.

IMPLICATIONS: Without a proactive reinvestment strategy and more predictable funding, the need for updates could grow over time, gradually reducing service quality, increasing maintenance costs, and impacting resident satisfaction.

High Park Access, Uneven Equity

TODAY'S REALITY: Golden provides strong park and trail access, with 77% of residents living within a 10-minute walk of a Golden park and all residents within a one-mile drive.

EMERGING PRESSURE: Despite this strong access, nearly 2,700 residents in southern Golden face barriers from highways and steep terrain, limiting connections to parks and trails.

IMPLICATIONS: Physical and geographic barriers are creating inequities in who can participate, even with high overall system access.

Strong Trail Network, Ongoing Connectivity Needs

TODAY'S REALITY: Golden's trail system provides more than 27 miles of connections, including the Clear Creek Trail as a central corridor linking parks, downtown, and regional destinations. Trails consistently rank among the most valued amenities in community engagement, with high levels of use and satisfaction.

EMERGING PRESSURE: Rising use on Golden's trail network is accelerating wear on surfaces, structures, and related amenities, creating growing maintenance demands to keep trails accessible and high-quality.

IMPLICATIONS: Without increased reinvestment and proactive maintenance planning, high trail use could lead to declining conditions, safety concerns, and reduced user satisfaction over time.

Central Recreation Hub, Modernization Needs

TODAY'S REALITY: The GCC is Golden's primary indoor recreation facility, offering extensive fitness, aquatics, and multipurpose spaces that support year-round programs for all ages. Opened in 1994 and renovated in 2007, it serves as a central hub for health, wellness, and community connection.

EMERGING PRESSURE: Membership participation remains well below national benchmarks for similar facilities, and survey results ranked reinvestment in the GCC as the third-highest community priority. While the center offers substantial space, amenities are aging, pricing options are limited, and community rooms are significantly underused, leaving opportunities to modernize the facility, update guest experiences, and attract broader participation.

IMPLICATIONS: Without targeted reinvestment and strategic program growth, the GCC may continue to fall short of its full potential, limiting opportunities to increase membership, improve cost recovery, and maximize use of available space for the community.

8.0

MAPPING THE PATH FORWARD



Golden's parks, recreation, trails, and open space system are a cornerstone of community life, offering places to connect, explore, and stay active. As Golden looks to the next 10 years, this chapter outlines a clear path forward to strengthen core services, address community needs, and invest strategically in the future. The recommendations build on the momentum of the Path to Play process and reflect the community's vision for connecting people with nature, recreation, and one another.

Implementation Plan

The implementation plan organizes key findings into clear priorities, actionable goals, and measurable steps. It provides a framework for decision-making, funding, and phasing, working to ensure the Department can adapt to changing needs while staying true to Golden’s values and long-term vision. Each priority includes goals and action items designed to strengthen operations, expand access, care for existing assets, and enhance the community’s parks, recreation, and open space system.



PRIORITY A: Build Organizational Capacity

Strengthen internal operations, workforce systems, and strategic partnerships to improve service delivery and long-term sustainability.

- ▶ Goal 1-A: Strengthen Staffing and Workforce Structure
- ▶ Goal 2-A: Enhance Financial Sustainability
- ▶ Goal 3-A: Improve Data and Performance Tracking



PRIORITY B: Expand Access to Facilities and Programs

Address geographic gaps and work to ensure all residents have opportunities to participate in recreation by expanding programming, leveraging partnerships, and planning future facilities.

- ▶ Goal 1-B: Expand Programming Beyond the GCC
- ▶ Goal 2-B: Plan for Future Community Facilities



PRIORITY C: Take Care of Existing Assets

Strengthen preventive and proactive maintenance practices to extend asset lifecycles, reduce long-term costs, and maintain a high standard of safety and quality.

- ▶ Goal 1-C: Proactive Maintenance and Care
- ▶ Goal 2-C: Plan for Facility Renovation and Replacement
- ▶ Goal 3-C: Modernize the Golden Community Center



PRIORITY D: Expand Community Recreation Opportunities

Advance aquatics and recreation programs to meet high demand, broaden participation, and diversify opportunities across Golden.

- ▶ Goal 1-D: Strengthen Aquatics Capacity
- ▶ Goal 2-D: Expand Programming for All Ages
- ▶ Goal 3-D: Establish Systemwide Participation Benchmarks



PRIORITY E: Support and Advance the Open Space Master Plan

Work to ensure implementation of open space priorities in alignment with Golden's long-term vision for conservation, stewardship, and community benefit.

- Goal 1-E: Advance Open Space Master Plan Implementation



PRIORITY F: Enhance and Sustain Golden's Trail System

Maintain, expand, and connect Golden's trails to support recreation, mobility, and access while ensuring long-term sustainability.

- Goal 1-F: Maintain and Improve Existing Trails
- Goal 2-F: Promote Sustainable Use and Education





PRIORITY A:
Build Organizational Capacity

Strengthen internal operations, workforce systems, and strategic partnerships to improve service delivery and long-term sustainability.

GOAL 1-A Strengthen Staffing and Workforce Structure

- ▶ Align staffing with community demand and facility responsibilities by using clear benchmarks for recreation programs, park maintenance, and citywide facilities. Metrics tied to participation, visitation, acreage, and facility square footage will guide when additional positions are needed to sustain high-quality service delivery.
- ▶ Add at least one additional FTE programmer to address staffing shortages in high-demand program areas. The Department currently relies on two FTEs to manage nearly 700 programs (excluding aquatics) serving about 7,000 participants annually—more than double the recommended benchmark of 2,000–3,000 participants per FTE programmer based on NRPA Park Metrics and national best practices. Establish participation-based benchmarks to guide future staffing adjustments so program growth, marketing capacity, and waitlist management keep pace with community demand.
- ▶ Add at least two full-time park maintenance FTEs to better align staffing with both acreage and trail maintenance needs. Golden currently maintains 167 high-use developed acres and 27 miles of trails with 10 full-time maintenance FTEs, equating to roughly one FTE per 16.7 acres. Industry benchmarks recommend 1 FTE per 15–20 acres for moderate service levels and 1 FTE per 8–12 acres for athletic complexes or heavily used parks. High visitation on Golden’s parks and trail corridors places additional strain on existing resources, suggesting the need to factor in trail mileage as well as acreage when evaluating staffing. Adding at least two FTEs would move Golden closer to best-practice staffing levels and help prevent deferred maintenance on both parks and trails.
- ▶ Evaluate facility maintenance staffing needs using total square footage and facility type as key metrics. Golden currently maintains more than 25 facilities totaling 230,000 square feet with 5 full-time maintenance FTEs. Industry benchmarks recommend 1 FTE per 25,000–35,000 square feet for moderate service levels, with additional staffing for specialized facilities such as aquatic centers, historic buildings, or high-use community centers. At the 1 FTE per 35,000 square feet standard, Golden would need 6.5 FTEs, indicating a current shortfall of 1.5 FTEs. Future planning should evaluate the cost-benefit balance between in-house staffing and contracted services to ensure the most efficient and sustainable approach to facility maintenance.
- ▶ Add staff capacity to manage Department-wide CIP projects. As capital improvement investments grow, dedicated staffing will be needed to oversee planning, budgeting, contractor coordination, and project delivery. Centralizing CIP project management would improve efficiency, reduce delays, and ensure consistent oversight across parks, facilities, and infrastructure projects.
- ▶ Consider adding a system administrator position to oversee RecTrac, WebTMA, Cartegraph, and the proposed campground management system. A dedicated administrator would ensure consistent data standards, manage integrations, coordinate staff training, and support system upgrades so that the Department fully leverages its technology investments.
- ▶ Add strategies to strengthen staff retention through improved morale, professional development, and clear advancement pathways. High turnover disrupts service delivery, increases training costs, and reduces institutional knowledge. Consistent retention efforts will ensure that investments in new positions translate into long-term capacity and stability.

GOAL 2-A Strengthen Financial Planning and Reinvestment

- ▶ Build a long-term financial strategy that balances cost recovery, innovative revenue generation, and predictable capital planning to support equitable access, modernize facilities, and sustain high-quality services.
- ▶ Develop a comprehensive cost recovery model across all enterprise operations (GCC, the Golden Cemetery, The Splash, RV Park, Fossil Trace), with tiered targets by service type (e.g., 80 – 100% for enterprise facilities, 40 – 60% for general recreation programs, 0 – 30% for equity-focused services) and an annual dashboard to report results.
- ▶ Create a multi-year CIP that prioritizes reinvestment needs across parks, facilities, and trails, including project scoring criteria, funding strategies, and a transparent timeline to guide annual budget requests and ensure long-term financial sustainability.
- ▶ Introduce new revenue strategies such as family and multi-facility memberships, expanded seasonal and off-peak use of The Splash, and dynamic pricing models for rentals and high-demand activities to increase utilization and financial return.
- ▶ Conduct a space utilization study of GCC community rooms and re-envision underutilized spaces for higher-value uses (e.g., coworking, youth/teen hub, after-school programming).
- ▶ Establish an annual grants and partnerships strategy with measurable revenue targets, prioritizing funding that supports reinvestment in underserved neighborhoods such as South Golden and leveraging partnerships with schools, universities, and health providers.

GOAL 3-A Improve Data and Performance Tracking

- ▶ Strengthen the Department’s ability to make data-driven decisions by standardizing systems, improving data capture, and establishing consistent evaluation tools across facilities and programs.
- ▶ Fully integrate RecTrac, WebTMA, and Cartegraph into a unified tracking system for programs, facilities, and assets, working to ensure accurate cross-platform reporting and reducing staff time spent on duplicate data entry.
- ▶ Standardize program setup and coding in RecTrac to improve reporting accuracy, track cost recovery consistently, and allow comparison across program areas, facilities, and time periods.
- ▶ Pilot self-scan entry at the GCC to streamline check-in, reducing staff time at the front desk.
- ▶ Develop improved systems for tracking attendance and participation at the Front Porch, establishing clear metrics to measure program reach and community impact and using results to guide future programming.
- ▶ Strengthen technology use across all facilities by adopting consistent reporting protocols, dashboards, and evaluation tools that provide staff and leadership with real-time information on participation, cost recovery, and facility usage.
- ▶ Implement a dedicated reservation management system at the RV Park with features such as dynamic site mapping, variable pricing, integrated waitlist management, and WCAG accessibility standards to replace manual workarounds in RecTrac and improve reservation efficiency, reporting accuracy, and customer experience.



PRIORITY B:
**Expand Access
to Facilities and
Programs**

Address geographic gaps and work to ensure all residents have opportunities to participate in recreation by expanding programming, leveraging partnerships, and planning future facilities.

GOAL 1-B Expand Programming Beyond the GCC

- ▶ Expand recreation opportunities outside of the downtown core to help ensure all households can participate, with a focus on underserved neighborhoods and flexible delivery models.
- ▶ Partner with schools, faith-based organizations, and community groups to deliver programs in the south area of Golden, reducing barriers related to location and transportation.
- ▶ Pilot mobile and pop-up programs (e.g., fitness classes in parks, seasonal events, traveling youth programs) to extend services into neighborhoods without permanent recreation facilities.

GOAL 2-B Plan for Future Community Facilities

- ▶ Guide future facility development in southern Golden to close service gaps and ensure investments are phased, equitable, and responsive to community needs.
- ▶ Develop a site-specific master plan for the South Neighborhood property to address park walkability gaps, guide phased development, and balance immediate recreation needs, including decisions on open space versus programmed space.
- ▶ Evaluate the feasibility of a satellite community center in southern Golden to provide year-round recreation space, reduce geographic barriers, and serve as a permanent hub for programs and rentals.





PRIORITY C:
**Take Care of
Existing Assets**

Strengthen preventive and proactive maintenance practices to extend asset lifecycles, reduce long-term costs, and maintain a high standard of safety and quality.

GOAL 1-C Proactive Maintenance and Care

- ▶ Implement a comprehensive preventive maintenance program with clear service standards, scheduled inspections, and performance measures for all major assets.
- ▶ Conduct a full irrigation system assessment to identify aging infrastructure, improve water efficiency, and guide replacement schedules and capital investments.
- ▶ Complete a citywide facilities assessment to evaluate building conditions, prioritize repairs, and integrate findings into long-term capital and maintenance plans.
- ▶ Leverage asset management systems such as Cartegraph and WebTMA to track maintenance costs, staff time, and asset conditions, using data to guide reinvestment priorities.
- ▶ Incorporate visitation levels into lifecycle replacement schedules so that heavily used facilities and amenities are evaluated more frequently, ensuring safety, functionality, and cost-effective reinvestment over time.
- ▶ Complete a tree inventory study to document species, health, and condition of all public trees, providing a foundation for proactive maintenance, risk management, and reinvestment planning.

GOAL 2-C Plan for Facility Renovation and Replacement

- ▶ Guide reinvestment in aging facilities through long-term planning, clear funding strategies, and transparent replacement schedules.
- ▶ Develop facility-specific replacement schedules for major systems (e.g., HVAC, roofs, aquatic features, playgrounds, irrigation) supported by lifecycle cost models to anticipate long-term financial needs and reduce reliance on reactive funding.
- ▶ Develop funding strategies for major reinvestment in the GCC, The Splash, and other aging facilities, including dedicated capital reserves, grants, and partnerships.
- ▶ Establish a dedicated Playground Replacement Fund with a predictable 15–20 year replacement cycle. Incorporate visitation levels, to adjust replacement schedules where needed. Fund the program through annual CIP allocations or dedicated reserves using lifecycle costing (e.g., total replacement value divided by expected lifespan) to determine yearly contributions and avoid large, one-time budget impacts.

GOAL 3-C Modernize the Golden Community Center

- ▶ Strengthen the GCC's role as Golden's primary indoor recreation hub through a Facility Reinvestment Plan, targeted upgrades, and operational improvements.
- ▶ Develop a Facility Reinvestment Plan for the GCC to evaluate building systems, space utilization, programming needs, and modernization opportunities, creating a clear roadmap for phased improvements.
- ▶ Plan and fund a major GCC reinvestment project that updates aging mechanical systems, aquatic areas, and community spaces while improving energy efficiency and visitor experience.
- ▶ Align pricing, membership structures, and marketing strategies with updated amenities to grow participation and improve cost recovery.



PRIORITY D:
**Expand Community
 Recreation
 Opportunities**

Advance aquatics and recreation programs to meet high demand, broaden participation, and diversify opportunities across Golden.

GOAL 1-D Strengthen Aquatics Capacity

- ▶ Ensure Golden’s aquatics programs and facilities keep pace with high demand, address aging infrastructure, and maximize community benefit.
- ▶ Expand swim lesson and recreational swim opportunities at both GCC and The Splash to meet community needs.
- ▶ Plan for facility reinvestment at The Splash and the GCC pools to update aging amenities, improve visitor experience, and align with long-term replacement schedules.
- ▶ Explore partnerships with schools, nonprofits, and private providers to increase instruction capacity and access to additional water space.
- ▶ Implement targeted marketing strategies to boost participation at The Splash and stabilize attendance levels.
- ▶ Evaluate staffing models, scheduling, and operational efficiency to maximize program availability while maintaining safety and quality.
- ▶ Incorporate visitation data into lifecycle planning so that high-use aquatic facilities are prioritized for timely upgrades and replacements.

GOAL 2-D Expand Programming for All Ages

- ▶ Broaden recreation offerings to serve residents across all ages and interests, ensuring access to diverse, high-quality programs throughout the community.
- ▶ Expand adult programming in fitness, wellness, pottery, arts, athletics, and cultural learning to balance youth-focused offerings.
- ▶ Pilot City-led youth sports programs that provide affordable, entry-level opportunities for participants of all skill levels.
- ▶ Explore the addition of after-school recreation programming in partnership with schools and community groups to offer accessible, structured activities during out-of-school hours.
- ▶ Deliver nature and environmental education programs directly in parks, trails, and open spaces, using Golden’s outdoor assets as living classrooms.
- ▶ Introduce newer and emerging activities identified by residents, such as mountain biking, kickball, and programs focused on mental health and overall wellness.

GOAL 3-D Establish Systemwide Participation Benchmarks

- ▶ Create clear participation and household reach goals to guide program planning, evaluate performance, and ensure offerings adapt to changing community needs.
- ▶ Set program-level targets such as 10–15 participants per session to align program size with cost recovery, efficiency, and community demand.
- ▶ Measure household reach annually with a goal of engaging 20–30% of Golden households across all programs each year.
- ▶ Apply user satisfaction and participation metrics to guide staffing levels, pricing strategies, marketing efforts, and decisions about where to expand or adjust programs to maintain equitable access.



PRIORITY E:
Support and Advance
the Open Space
Master Plan

Work to ensure implementation of open space priorities in alignment with Golden's long-term vision for conservation, preservation, stewardship and community benefit.

GOAL 1-E Advance OSMP Implementation

- ▶ Golden's OSMP establishes a phased approach to protecting and enhancing open space. The Department should continue implementing Phase 2 priorities and prepare for Phase 3, ensuring alignment with community values and long-term vision.
- ▶ Enhance long-term care of Golden's open space properties while building community awareness and involvement.
- ▶ Phase in a standardized management framework to guide vegetation, habitat, and cultural resource stewardship across all open space properties.
- ▶ Improve public education on conservation through signage, digital tools, and stewardship programs highlighting ecological values and responsible use.
- ▶ Strengthen collaboration with regional land managers, historical and tribal organizations, and community groups to align conservation and stewardship efforts.
- ▶ Secure the resources needed to steward Golden's open space system today and earmark funding in the City's general operating budget to support Phase 3 of Open Space Planning.
- ▶ Transition to OSMP Phase 3 by completing field-based inventories and developing site-specific management assessments.





PRIORITY F:
Enhance and Sustain
Golden's Trail System

Maintain, expand, and connect Golden's trails to support recreation, mobility, and access while ensuring long-term sustainability.

GOAL 1-F Maintain and Improve Existing Trails

- ▶ Work to ensure Golden's trail system remains accessible and high-quality.
- ▶ Establish an annual inspection cycle for paved and soft-surface trails, mapping conditions and prioritizing maintenance needs.
- ▶ Address surfacing, drainage, and erosion proactively to help prevent costly repairs.
- ▶ Prioritize high-use corridors such as Clear Creek, downtown connectors, and neighborhood access points based on visitation data.
- ▶ Integrate accessibility improvements into upgrades, including grade adjustments, ADA-compliant surfacing, and wayfinding.
- ▶ Perform targeted repairs on natural surface trails every four to six years or sooner as conditions require.
- ▶ Coordinate with JCOS, CDOT, and adjacent municipalities to strengthen regional trail connections that support both recreation and active transportation.

GOAL 2-F Promote Sustainable Use and Education

- ▶ Balance high trail use with conservation and responsible recreation.
- ▶ Apply sustainable trail design and management practices (e.g., contour alignment, hardened crossings, seasonal closures) to protect habitats.
- ▶ Install educational signage and digital tools along major corridors to promote safety, etiquette, and stewardship.
- ▶ Expand volunteer and partner stewardship programs, including trail adoption and clean-up days, to support upkeep and community pride.
- ▶ Monitor use and impacts through trail counters, condition assessments, and visitor surveys to adapt management strategies.



City of
Golden

CITY OF GOLDEN, CO Parks and Recreation **MASTER PLAN**