

Appendix B - Boulder Parks and Recreation History and Accomplishments

Boulder Parks and Recreation History

Boulder's cultural history is closely linked to the city's love for parks and recreation, as Suzanne Hudson reveals in *A History of Boulder's Parks and Recreation*. As early as 1868, 10 years after gold seekers arrived at the mouth of Boulder Canyon, Boulder had an unofficial park—the town square where the County Courthouse now stands. It featured a flagpole, the town pump, a bandstand, a baseball diamond, and a fence to keep the cows and pigs out. In 1869, recreation-minded residents bought 40 acres between 28th and 30th, south of Valmont, and erected a grandstand for horse races and a country fair. A roller-skating craze beginning in 1878 led to a roller rink at 14th and Spruce.

Becoming a City of Parks

As the city grew, residents began to see the need for more park land. In April 1898, city leaders asked voters to approve the purchase of 80 acres for the Texas-Colorado Chautauqua Association. The proposition carried almost unanimously, resulting in Chautauqua Park. The auditorium, dining hall, community house, and other permanent structures were built soon after. Boulder acquired more land for parks and recreation, including an 1899 gift from the U.S. Congress of 1,800 acres extending from the top of Flagstaff Mountain to the mouth of Four Mile Canyon, and from Sunshine Canyon to Green Mountain.

In 1903, the Boulder City Improvement Association was formed to help the city acquire land for urban parks. The city established an official Park Board, which complemented the Association's efforts by recommending park land acquisitions and administering a small maintenance budget. In 1908, the improvement association invited renowned landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. to recommend ways to make the city "increasingly convenient, agreeable, and generally satisfactory as a place in which to live and work." Olmsted advised providing adequate parks and open spaces, and suggested preserving the Boulder Creek flood plain as park land. Olmsted's report became the first master plan that included city parks.

There were many park land acquisitions in the early 1900s. Between 1914 and 1929, the Charles G. Buckingham family donated 120 acres of mountain property, including Boulder Falls and 30 acres of land at Eldora for a campground. In 1925, Theodore Lashley sold the land for North Boulder Park to the city for \$3,000 and then gave the city \$3,000 to improve it. From 1906 to 1933, the city purchased several parcels of land from the Colorado and Southern Railway to create what is now Central Park. The city also built facilities, including, in 1923, the spectacular, tri-towered Hygienic Natatorium, which featured slides, rings, and a trapeze for the "athletically inclined."

By 1932, the city boasted 62 park acres within city limits and 6,362 acres on its borders. Through the Great Depression, the city's parks benefited from work relief projects. The federal Civilian Conservation Corps built the Flagstaff amphitheater and many miles of foot and bridle trails. The federal Works Progress Administration (WPA) developed Beach Park and a nine-hole precursor to Flatirons Golf Course.

Becoming a City of Recreation

In 1918 the charter under which the City of Boulder operates went into effect. The charter specified that the Department of Public Welfare would coordinate the city's charitable activities. By 1920, the department developed a municipal band and started a summer playground program that involved more than 4,300 children. For a few years, the city enjoyed year-round recreation programs featuring community picnics, concerts, a photography contest, and a boys' wireless club.

In the 1930s, the men's night softball league proved a popular source of entertainment. There were 26 teams in 1931, when relief programs such as the WPA provided 10 employees to umpire and do field maintenance. The recreation program's success led in 1937 to formation of the Community Recreation Asso-

ciation, which was funded by the city council, the school board, and the YMCA.

Begun in 1934 as a community effort to lift citizens' spirits, the Pay Dirt Pow Wow was held on a site that now includes the East Mapleton Ballfields. The Pow Wow featured a parade, a bike race to Longmont and back, and the Hard Rock Drilling Championship of the World. Evolving into annual event with a rodeo, it ended in 1958 when financial problems led to a donation of the land to the city.

In 1945, the city changed the name of the Hygienic Pool to the Municipal Pool. Swimming classes had 10,000 participants that year. During the summer of 1946, public swimming was curtailed due to an outbreak of polio that closed the pool. Attempting to make the Municipal Pool building more useful year-round, the city in 1948 leased it as a roller rink, with wooden planks laid across the pool that were removed in summer.

The department curtailed the recreation program during World War II when the WPA withdrew assistance. Softball, however, continued to be a main source of entertainment; leading to formation of the Boulder Softball Association (BSA) in 1948. The city's first full-time recreation director, Willard N. Leuthauser, was hired in 1951, at an annual salary of \$3,600 from the city's \$5,000 recreation program appropriation. Under Leuthauser's direction, recreation classes included archery, ceramics, piano, oil painting, jewelry making, modern dance, square dancing, scuba diving, and photography.

Beginning in 1957, the Recreation Department sponsored a day camp for children with developmental disabilities. Recreation programs for people with special needs expanded when the city started building low-income housing units in the 1970s. In 1980, Boulder hired its first recreation therapist, who started the EXPAND (Extra Special Programs, Activities, and New Dimensions) program to serve people with many kinds of disabilities.

Expansion of Parks and Recreation Facilities

In post-World War II Boulder, citizens voted funding for projects to enhance recreation opportunities, such as \$2 million in bonds in 1952 to construct the Boulder Reservoir. In 1962, they voted for \$105,000 in bonds to preserve Enchanted Mesa, as well as funds to remodel the Municipal Pool and to build a pool and playground named in honor of Scott Carpenter, the astronaut and former Boulder resident. Several years later, the city assumed responsibility for the circa-1869 Columbia Cemetery, the final resting place for many of Boulder's early settlers. In 1960, the city founded the Parks and Recreation Department and formed the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board.

In 1971, voters approved \$1.6 million to build the North and South Boulder recreation centers as well as a measure that allowed city council to use bonding in greenbelt purchases. Thus began the city's open space program. In the 1970s, the city also developed the Pearl Street Mall, closing four blocks downtown to auto traffic, and began developing the greenway trail along Boulder Creek that links numerous parks and facilities.

A 1980s bond issue pumped \$2.4 million into improvements at the Boulder Reservoir and paid for two community park sites and the construction of the Gerald Stazio Ballfield Complex. During this decade, the Parks and Recreation Department began planning East Boulder Community Park. In 1981, voters approved the Colorado State Lottery, which gave 14 cents of every dollar spent on lottery tickets to local parks and recreation districts. In 1983, Boulder used lottery funds to build the 5,000-square-foot gymnastics center addition at the North Boulder Recreation Center. The department took over operation of the Flatirons Country Club and has maintained the golf course ever since. The Boulder Creek Trail was begun with a \$30,000 capital improvement project at 9th and Canyon that evolved into the Charles A. Haertling Sculpture Park. In 1989, an annual clean-up of Boulder Creek became the Boulder Creek Festival, which continues today.

Parks and Recreation Today

The Boulder Parks and Recreation Department provides services for more than 101,000 people, including within the city of Boulder (Area I) and for more than 10,000 living outside city boundaries in areas that could be annexed within the next 15 years.

The department manages 80-plus urban parks and recreation facilities including:

- 3 community parks--Harlow Platts, East Boulder, and Foothills
- 59 neighborhood parks, pocket parks, and playgrounds
- Special facilities including dog parks, roller hockey, tennis, basketball, volleyball courts, skatepark, picnic shelters, disc golf course, pottery lab
- 3 full-service recreation centers with indoor pools--North, South, and East Boulder
- Gymnastics center at North Boulder Recreation Center
- 3 sports complexes--East Mapleton Ballfields, Pleasant View Fields, and Stazio Ballfield Complex
- 2 outdoor pools--Spruce and Scott Carpenter
- Boulder Reservoir (developed recreation area and natural areas)
- Flatirons Golf Course
- Pearl Street Mall
- Historic and cultural facilities, including Chautauqua Park, Columbia Cemetery, and the Harbeck House
- Andrews Arboretum and 37,500 urban trees
- Natural lands including Coot Lake and Papini and Kentucky properties
- Boulder Creek Greenway Bike Trail corridor, including 200 miles of paths
- 1 large partially developed city park at Valmont
- 1 large undeveloped city park in Area III

From fall 2005 through summer 2006, the department offered 1,030-plus recreation programs for more than 36,040 participants (nearly 20 percent nonresidents), including:

- 2,946 swim lessons registrants
- 3,664 yoga registrants
- 959 wellness/fitness registrants
- 756 art and leisure registrants
- 3,192 dance registrants
- 1,018 pottery registrants
- 5,917 gymnastics registrants, the largest public gymnastics program in Colorado
- 337 camp registrants
- 1,619 EXPAND (people with disabilities) registrants
- 419 golf and sailing registrants
- 223 youth services registrants
- 3,770 sport team registrants with:
 - 8,805 players on 585 softball teams
 - 2,355 players on 157 soccer teams
 - 498 volleyball players on 179 teams
 - 709 tennis lesson registrants
 - 534 players on 161 basketball teams through leagues and tournaments

Accomplishments Since the 1996 Master Plan

New Parks

The 1996 Parks and Recreation Master Plan outlined an ambitious program of land acquisition based on the finding that rapidly rising land costs and diminishing land area for park and recreation facility development would severely limit future options. The 1995 approval by Boulder voters of the dedicated .25 Cent Sales Tax for parks and recreation allowed the department to proceed with a major land acquisition effort.

The department acquired 369 acres, exceeding the 1996 land acquisition goals for city, community, neighborhood, and pocket parks. The new park lands and parks include:

- o **City Parks.** The 1996 Master Plan recommended acquiring between 100 and 300 acres to build a large city park or parks. The department purchased 104 acres for Valmont City Park. In 2003, the department completed Phase 1 and 2, in which 17 acres were developed with walks, trails, a service road, open turf areas, seating and picnic areas, and infrastructure such as sewer, utilities, and raw-water infrastructure for irrigation.

The Valmont City Park concept plan was created with community involvement and endorsed by PRAB and City Council in 1998. It features four buildings for potential recreational uses such as a pool, gymnasium, ice rink, and arts and dance space; open turf areas for informal play, multi-use trails, cross-country ski trails, playing fields, hard-surface courts for tennis, basketball, and roller hockey; space for special events, group picnic areas, children's play areas, youth skate facilities, community gardens, and a fenced dog-exercise area. Two historic buildings within the park are preserved for community use, and existing natural features are reserved for quiet past-time uses and wildlife observation. Further Valmont Park development depends on revising the site plan and identifying funding.

The department purchased another 191 acres for a city park in Area III, that remains undeveloped.

- o **New community parks.** The department has a master plan for the 65.5-acre Foothills Community Park. Fifty acres have been developed with large open turf/playing fields, native grassland restoration, a loop trail, two children's play areas, a youth fitness/climbing wall, two roller-hockey courts, a basketball court, a dog park, community gardens, a picnic shelter and seating, a maintenance/restroom building, roads, utilities, parking, landscaping, and public art. In 2006, Phase 2 development was completed, including a large playground, large-group picnic shelters, volleyball, more parking, and public restrooms. At East Boulder Community Park, 12 acres remain undeveloped next to 40 acres that were developed in the 1980s and 1990s.

- o **New neighborhood and pocket parks.** The department acquired nearly 73 new acres of neighborhood and pocket parks since 1996. These include:

- Elks Park – 8 acres
- Dakota Ridge Park – 3 acres
- Holiday Park – 1.1 acre
- Eaton Park – 23 acres
- Tom Watson Park – 31 acres (owned by IBM and managed under a park and recreation easement agreement since 1998)
- Lover's Hill Park – .25 acre (land provided by Transportation Department)
- Elmer's Two Mile Park – 4 acres (land provided by Flood Control)
- Fortune Park - .33 acre
- Alpine Park - .3 acre
- Mesa Memorial Park – 1.7 acre

Since 1996, the department has developed four neighborhood and pocket park sites. These include:

- Greenleaf Park
- Meadow Glen Park
- Elmer's Two Mile Park
- Lover's Hill Park

o New or Renovated Park and Recreation Facilities

Acquisition, development, upgrading, and refurbishment of facilities since 1996 include:

- Renovation and upgrading of the North Boulder Recreation Center and pool, a 61,000-square-foot project including a new lap pool, a leisure pool, a weight/exercise room, dance/yoga rooms, locker rooms, and a new gymnasium for an expanded gymnastics program
- Renovation of the South Boulder Recreation Center and pool, featuring a new pool, roof, locker rooms, entry area, landscape, and an elevator
- Renovation of the Boulder Reservoir bathhouse and concession building, and installation of sod and an irrigation system in picnic areas
- Purchase of the 2.6-acre inholding parcel of Angel Pines Country Club to complete the Flatirons Golf Course, and construction of outdoor gathering areas
- Renovation of the disc golf course at Harlow Platts
- Refurbishment of Spruce Pool
- Relining and upgrading of Scott Carpenter Pool
- Development or renovation of seven playgrounds, including at Scott Carpenter, Wonderland Lake, Beach, East Palo, Arrowwood, and Tom Watson parks
- Renovation of Eben G. Fine Park
- Renovation of the hard-surface courts and landscape at Baseline Middle School and the playground at Casey Middle School under a joint-use agreement with the Boulder Valley School District
- Upgrading of 10 facilities to comply with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility requirements
- Development of ADA-accessible interpretive trails at Eaton Park and Coot Lake wetlands
- Development of the skatepark
- Development of three additional fields at the Stazio Ballfield Complex and two additional fields at Pleasant View Fields
- Development of a computerized irrigation system for all sites and renovation of irrigation systems at many sites
- Development of dog parks at four sites
- Renovation of the court facilities, playground, and restroom building at Tom Watson Park
- Renovation of some of the city's historic properties, including the Central Park Bandshell and train, Columbia Cemetery, Chautauqua Dining Hall, and the Harbeck House history museum, which have been funded in part with grants from the Colorado Historical Society and \$50,000 per year in seed money from the 1995 ballot issue for city owned historic and cultural facilities
- Refurbishment annually of two to four tennis courts