



CITY OF LA JUNTA PARKS AND RECREATION SYSTEM MASTER PLAN 2020-2025



www.lajuntacolorado.org

City of La Junta Parks and Recreation System Master Plan 2020-2025

Rick Klein
City Manager



Brock Hinkhouse
Director of Parks and Recreation

Stephen A. Wolter
Executive Director



Sarah J. Murray
Program Manager

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

La Junta Parks and Recreation Department- 601 Colorado Ave, La Junta, CO 81050

Brock Hinkhouse, Director of Parks and Recreation

La Junta City Council

Jeffri Pruyn- Mayor

Eugene Mestas

Paul Velasquez

Chandra Ochoa

Elaine McIntyre

Edward Vela

Scott Eckhart

Eppley Institute for Parks and Public Lands

Gina Depper

Layne Elliott

Sarah J. Murray

Maggie O'Heran

Katy Patrick

Kellie Seaton

Hayley Turner

Matt Wolf

Stephen Wolter

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Executive Summary	1
Planning Area: La Junta, CO	1
Goals of the Plan	1
Need for a Plan	1
Key Partners	1
Master Plan Process	2
Process	2
Research Protocol	2
Benchmarking	2
Trends Analysis	3
Community Engagement	3
Master Plan Website	3
Stakeholder Interviews	3
Community Survey	4
Community Background	5
Governmental Structure	5
Otero County	5
Natural Setting	6
Cultural and Historical Setting	7
Transportation	8
Social and Economic Factors	10
Public Health Data and Trends	17
Summary	11
Public Input Responses and Analysis	12
Stakeholder Interview Analysis	13
Summary	13
Community Survey Analysis	23
Geospatial Analysis	19
Conditions and Accessibility Assessment	20

Introduction	20
Parks	20
Recreation Facilities	26
Trails	29
Benchmarking Analysis	30
Introduction and Inclusion Analysis	30
Peer Communities Characteristics	31
Agency Characteristics and Staffing	31
Agency Budgets and Funding	33
Agency Facilities	34
Programming	35
Benchmarking Summary	36
Trends Analysis	37
National Trends	37
Needs Analysis	39
Parks and Trails	39
Recreation Facilities	40
Recreation Programming	41
Strategic Action Plan	42
Criticality and Timeframe	42
Strategic Action Items	42
Trails	45
Conclusion	46
References	47
Appendices	49
Appendix A: Stakeholder Interview Responses in Aggregate	49
Appendix B: Intergenerational Park Design Concept	54
Appendix C: Livewell Park Redesign	55

TABLES

Table 1: Incorporated Communities in Otero County (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018a)	5
Table 2: Household Income (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018b)	9
Table 3: Employment Sector Key	10
Table 4: Leading Employers (City of La Junta, 2017)	10
Table 5: Outcome and Factor Rankings for Otero County (County Health Rankings, 2020)	10
Table 6: Health Behaviors in Otero County Population (County Health Rankings, 2020)	11
Table 7: Percentage of Residents with a Disability (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018b)	11
Table 8: Community representation vs survey response	14
Table 9: Responses for not visiting individual parks, grouped by major theme	16
Table 10: Lack of interest type broken down by park	16
Table 11: How the community currently learns about Department programs and services compared to how they would preferto be informed	18
Table 12: Internal classification of La Junta parks	12
Table 13: Map of benchmarking communities in Colorado	31
Table 14: Baseline Characteristics of Peer Agencies	31
Table 15: Staffing Levels of Peer Agencies	32
Table 16: Review of Peer Agencies' Budgets	33
Table 17: Aquatic Facilities	34
Table 18: Buildings and Facilities	34
Table 19: Athletic and Recreation Facilities	34
Table 20: Other facilities	35
Table 21: Programming for Children, Seniors, People with Disabilities	35
Table 22: Program Offerings: Sports and Fitness	35
Table 23: Program Offerings: Arts, Crafts, Nature, Leisure, and Cultural	36

Table 24: LOS for Parks and Trails	39
Table 25: LOS for Facilities	40
Table 26: Action items for all parks, recreation facilities, and programming	42
Table 27: Action items for City Park	44
Table 28: Action items for College Overlook Park	44
Table 29: Action items for Red Crane Park	44
Table 30: Action items for the municipal cemetery	44
Table 31: Recreation facility and programming action items for 22nd Street	44
Table 32: Recreation facility and programming action items for Edison Park	44
Table 33: Recreation facility and programming action items for the disc golf course	44
Table 34: Facility and programming action items for the community swimming pool	45
Table 35: Facility and programming action items for Potter Park	45
Table 36: Facility and programming action items for the Rodeo Grounds	45
Table 41: Action items for trails	45

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1: La Junta Population from 2014-2018 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018b)	8
Figure 2: (top right): La Junta Population Age Distribution (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018b)	8
Figure 3: (bottom right): La Junta Population Race and Ethnicity Distribution (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018b)	8
Figure 4: Educational Attainment (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018)	9
Figure 5: Employment by Sector (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018b)	9
Figure 6: La Junta age distribution – survey results compared to 2017 U.S. Census estimates	14
Figure 7: La Junta household race	14
Figure 8: La Junta household income	14
Figure 9: La Junta representation in community survey	15
Figure 10 (right): Map of central La Junta parks and trails	10
Figure 11 (right): Histogram demonstrating percentile of La Junta’s population living within a 10-minute walk from a general-purpose park	20
Figure 12: Historic stone structure in City Park is being renovated for public use.	21
Figure 13: Dilapidated tennis courts in City Park.	21
Figure 14: Playground in City Park	21
Figure 15: Basketball courts in College Overlook Park	22
Figure 16: Playground at College Overlook Park	22
Figure 17: Edison Park	22
Figure 18: Pikes Park	23
Figure 19: Entrance to Potter Park	23
Figure 20: Open green space with picnic tables and horseshoe pits at Potter Park	23
Figure 21: Baseball field, picnic table, and spectator bleachers at Prairie View Park	24
Figure 22: Picnic shelter at Prairie View Park	24
Figure 23: Playground at Prairie View Park	24

Figure 24: Playground at Red Crane Park	25
Figure 25: Santa Fe Plaza	25
Figure 26: Historic train at Train Hill Park	25
Figure 27: 22nd Street baseball field	26
Figure 28: Spectator stands at 22nd Street baseball stadium	26
Figure 29: Clay Hills Flying Saucer Disc Golf Course	26
Figure 30: One of the course holes at the disc golf course	26
Figure 31: Spectator stands at the Rodeo Grounds	27
Figure 32: La Junta Rodeo Grounds	27
Figure 33: The main community room at the Senior Center	27
Figure 34: La Junta community swimming pool, water slide, and picnic tables under shade structure	28
Figure 35: La Junta community swimming pool zero entry access end	28
Figure 36: Tippy Martinez commemorative sign	28
Figure 37: Tippy Martinez field	28
Figure 38: Bleachers at Veterans Field	29
Figure 39: Veterans Field	29
Figure 40: Map of benchmarking communities in Colorado	30

INTRODUCTION

Executive Summary

Park and recreation system master plans are created as strategic planning tools to guide municipal park departments in creating policy, making fiscal decisions, and reaching long-range planning decisions. This is the first park and recreation system master plan for the City of La Junta. It is not intended to dictate or force decisions on the community or city government; this plan is meant to present a review of park system, share information gathered via public engagement processes, identify opportunities and threats that might affect the system, and recommend strategic actions to allow the department to fulfill its mission most effectively.

The development of this master plan comes at a unique and extraordinary time in history. In the year 2020, the rapid spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) shut down the country in March and April and continued to impact human interaction for the rest of the year. The pandemic had a dramatic impact on the economy, education, and parks and recreation, among other sectors. With the Center for Disease Control (CDC) advising physical distancing between people to help slow the spread of the airborne virus, many people took to outdoor recreation activities and open spaces as a way to socialized and maintain mental and physical health. It impacted the ability to offer some formalized recreation programming in their traditional form and what was offered required restrictions to accommodate public health needs.

The pandemic greatly impacted the development of this master plan, particularly regarding community engagement and public input. Public health recommendations limited the size of in-person gathering, resulting in canceled public workshops and meetings for collecting community in-put. Efforts were made to move community engagement into virtual spaces, such as videoconferencing for stakeholder interviews and online data collection for the community survey. The data presented in the report attempted to capture usership prior to the pandemic. Community responses to the survey, however, were certainly impacted by the pandemic. Based on stakeholder interviews, usership data, and the broader context of how communities nationwide are turning to the outdoors in this crisis, it is the authors' opinion that user rates will continue to rise for La Junta's Parks and Recreation System.

Planning Area: La Junta, CO

This master plan serves the City of La Junta (City) and populated areas surrounding city limits. The City's Department of Parks and Recreation (Department) draws participants from surrounding communities to its recreation programming and facilities. These voices were captured with city residents in the community survey.

Goals of the Plan

Specific goals of this planning effort are to:

Create a visionary and aspirational parks and recreation system master plan that will guide the Department for the next five years.

Engage city residents and stakeholders through interviews and surveys to register their input for the plan.

Complete a facility inventory and needs assessment that ensures the City of La Junta is providing an appropriate level of service for its facilities.

Need for a Plan

System master plans are designed to be a documented road map to help communities achieve their goals and address needs and service gaps. It offers an opportunity to reflect on existing conditions and assets, envision a better future, and determine and document steps to get there. This system master plan outlines a strategic, implementable action plan for the Department for the next five years.

Key Partners

Key community partners to the Parks and Recreation Department were identified through the planning process to include:

- Community members
- City Council
- City of La Junta Economic Development
- La Junta public schools
- Local businesses and churches
- Otero Junior College
- Rec Board
- Southeast Mental Health Group
- Tourism Bureau
- Youth Commission

MASTER PLAN PROCESS

Process

The process of developing the plan began in January 2020 with a virtual kickoff meeting between the project team and City staff, as well as a thorough examination of department and community resources. A national trends analysis was completed in February to gain an understand of park and recreation trends occurring across the country. A community engagement process began in May and included individual and group virtual key stakeholder interviews. The community survey was administered in May and June. In August, parks, facilities, and programs were assessed, including a physical examination of each facility for amenities and quality. Benchmarking data collection took place August-October and was followed by a comprehensive analysis, assessment of needs, and development strategic action plan that established goals and strategic actions. The draft plan was presented to the La Junta City Council and the public in February 2021.

Research Protocol

To proactively plan for the future the City of La Junta Parks and Recreation Department partnered with the Eppley Institute for Parks and Public Lands to develop their first comprehensive parks and recreation master plan. Two critical components of the City of La Junta Parks and Recreation System Master Plan will be background research and civic engagement. Research, using past La Junta planning documents, benchmark community analysis, and national trends, helps place the La Junta Parks and Recreation Department in the context of other departments across the region and the country. The importance of civic engagement in the decision-making process cannot be underestimated and is necessary to implement the plan, compel the public to act, and to effectively deliver community-oriented park and recreation opportunities to citizens.

Benchmarking

Benchmarking allows park and recreation agencies to compare their resources, services, and operation with other agencies. The Eppley Institute collected data points from the La Junta Parks and Recreation Department from similar park agencies to draw comparisons and help gauge how the Department's facilities, programs, budget, and staffing compare with similar or aspirational agencies. Consistency in benchmark communities from one master plan to another can provide interesting comparisons over time. The communities selected for this current plan will provide an opportunity for future comparisons.

Trends Analysis

In addition to comparisons to specific communities, the Eppley Institute team analyzed national trends as reported by national park and recreation organizations. This analysis relied upon annual trend reports issued by the National Recreation and Park Association, the Trust for Public Lands, the Sports & Fitness Industry Association, and the American College of Sports Medicine. The information obtained from these organizations was used to compare level of service for facilities and programs on a national level to the City of La Junta. Tracking level of service is a way for agencies to evaluate the services that they offer while taking into consideration limited financial and human resources and land use goals. The level of service informs the needs analysis that will be conducted later in the planning process.





Community Engagement

The importance of civic engagement in the decision-making process cannot be underestimated and is necessary to implement the plan, compel the public to act, and to effectively deliver community-oriented park and recreation opportunities to citizens. Overall, the public engagement aspect of the master planning process must be balanced, open, and collaborative. The process must build community-wide trust and be developed carefully in order to create an outcome that will secure support for, and approval of, the system master plan by the City of La Junta, advisory groups, the La Junta City Council, and Department staff, as well as the community’s diverse user groups, including residents, park users, partners, and service providers. The following strategies were used:

- Master Plan Website
- Stakeholder Interviews
- Community Survey

These civic engagement methods were combined with related techniques to engage Department staff and City leadership.

Master Plan Website

The project team kept the public informed and updated about the master plan throughout the process using a website. The website was published in March 2020. From the time of launch and throughout the project, the site contained:

- General information about the parks and recreation master planning process,
- A project timeline and information about major milestones,
- Information about the consultant team, and
- Information about how to participate in the public engagement process.

Stakeholder Interviews

Stakeholders are individuals who represent the Department and community as a result of their position, involvement, interest, or identity in the community. Stakeholders in a community generally represent a cross section of the population and are interviewed in order to obtain a sense of overall public opinion.

La Junta stakeholders were identified by the project team and the Department Director and were invited to participate in the stakeholder interviews. Stakeholder interviews were conducted in small groups or individually by Eppley Institute staff members and scheduled in one-hour time slots. All interviews were conducted in a standardized format based on a questionnaire developed by the project team. Questions ranged from general, open-ended questions to specific yes or no questions. Some questions were geared toward

obtaining stakeholder opinions about general conditions and circumstances regarding parks, open space, and recreation in the City of La Junta. Other questions were geared toward ascertaining stakeholders' views on specific issues affecting parks, open space, recreation, and public health in the community.

Community Survey

A community survey was distributed to gauge public opinion, interests, and beliefs about the current recreation and park system in the City of La Junta. The survey was created by Eppley Institute staff and validated through review by Department staff.



COMMUNITY BACKGROUND

The City of La Junta, founded in 1881, is located along the Arkansas River in southeastern Colorado and characterized by shortgrass prairie terrain (City of La Junta, 2020). It is the county seat of Otero County and was a stop on the Santa Fe Trail, a major U.S. trading route in the nineteenth century (City of La Junta, 2020).

Governmental Structure

Under Colorado state law, La Junta became a home rule municipality and established its home rule charter in 1967, which authorized the City to govern local issues (City of La Junta, 2017). The City is divided into three wards, each of which elect two city council members. The seventh city council representative is an at-large member and serves as the city mayor. The city council appoints a city manager, who guides the administrative day-to-day operations of the City.

Otero County

The City of La Junta is the most populous incorporated community within Otero County (Table 1). The total population of Otero County in 2018 was 18,325, and the City of La Junta’s population at the same time was 6,998 people.

Community	2000	2010	2018 (est).	% Change 2010 to 2018
Cheraw	216	252	234	-7.1%
Fowler	1,209	1,182	1,311	-4.3%
La Junta	7,552	7,079	6,998	-1.1%
Manzanola	522	434	478	-10.1%
Rocky Ford	4,270	3,958	3,824	-3.4%
Swink	695	617	766	+24.1%
Unincorporated Area	5,779	5,316	4,714	-11.3%
Otero County	20,243	18,838	18,325	-2.7%

Table 1: Incorporated Communities in Otero County (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018a)

Natural Setting

Location

The Arkansas River runs through Arkansas, Oklahoma, Kansas, and southeastern Colorado. La Junta is situated on the southern bank of this tributary of the Mississippi-Missouri water system, nearly equidistant between the City of Pueblo and the state border with Kansas.

Geology and Topography

Surrounded by grassy plains and lowlands, there are many interesting topographies surrounding La Junta, which is within the Southwestern Tablelands ecoregion. This ecoregion is high plains terrain and contains sub-humid grassland and semi-arid rangeland (City of La Junta, 2017). Additionally, there are many unique geological features near the city: Pikes Peak to the north, the Spanish Peaks to the south and a subset of the Sangre de Cristo Range known as the Wet Mountains to the west (City of La Junta, 2017).

Flora and Fauna

The wide-open grasslands and protected natural areas in the La Junta vicinity are home to a unique variety of plant and wildlife species. Of particular interest and concern to La Junta Parks and Recreation are threatened and endangered species and invasive species. Both of these plant and wildlife groups will have to be properly managed in the case of additions or major modifications to the La Junta park system. According to the Colorado Department of Transportation Wildlife Program (2018), important threatened or endangered species in Otero County are as follows:

- Least Tern (interior population) *Sternula antillarum* Endangered
- Piping Plover *Charadrius melodus* Threatened

Rivers

As the sixth-longest river in the United States, the Arkansas River is the most significant natural feature in and near the City of La Junta. Nearly 1,470 miles long, running from its headwaters in the Rocky Mountains to the Mississippi River at Napoleon, Arkansas, the river is a major tributary on the Mississippi-Missouri River complex. At and near La Junta, the river is suitable for boating, canoeing, and fishing.

Climate and Precipitation

La Junta experiences four distinct seasons throughout the year and is in the hottest region of Colorado, with average highs of 94 degrees Fahrenheit in July and 91 degrees Fahrenheit in August (U.S. Climate Data, 2020). Temperatures frequently exceed 100 degrees Fahrenheit during summer (City of La Junta, 2017). In contrast, the average temperature in January is 17 degrees Fahrenheit (U.S. Climate Data, 2020). The climate is significantly influenced by the rain shadow effect produced by the surrounding mountains. The region usually experiences rain and snow in the fall and winter. The spring season has the highest level of rainfall. Annual average rainfall is approximately 11.5 inches, while average annual snowfall is approximately 30 inches (City of La Junta, 2017).

Protected Areas

La Junta is surrounded by several protected natural areas suitable for recreation, most notably the Comanche National Grassland and Vogel Canyon. These protected areas and others bring tourism and economic opportunity to both the city and region.

Comanche National Grassland

With over 440,000 acres of rangeland spanning three counties in southeast Colorado, the Comanche National Grassland is home to historic and natural wonders including dinosaur tracks, ancient Native American petroglyphs, abandoned 19th century homesteads, and abundant wildlife (U.S. Forest Service, n.d.a). There are many outdoor recreational pastimes available to the public at the Grasslands, including hiking, fishing, hunting, bicycling, horse riding, and picnicking (U.S. Forest Service, 2020a). Within the Grassland in Otero County are other natural attractions, including Vogel Canyon and Picket Wire Canyonlands.

Vogel Canyon

Thirteen miles south of La Junta is Vogel Canyon. Comprised of sandstone, the Vogel Canyon contains shortgrass prairie and juniper trees. Originally a tributary of Purgatoire River, it contains two permanent springs located at the bottom of the canyon that support wildlife (U.S. Forest Service, n.d.b). Various Native American communities lived in the canyon 300-800 years ago and Vogel Canyon's sandstone walls still contain rock art from its inhabitants (U.S. Forest Service, n.d.b).

The Vogel Canyon area has four trails for hiking, biking, and horseback riding (U.S. Forest Service, n.d.b). The trails offer breathtaking vistas and range in length from one to three miles. Along the canyon trails, there are many fascinating historic artifacts, including ancient Native American rock art, ruins of settlements, and the remains of stagecoach lines (U.S. Forest Service, n.d.b).

Picket Wire Canyonlands

South of the Vogel Canyon are the Picket Wire Canyonlands, which contain the largest number of preserved dinosaur tracks in the United States (U.S. Forest Service, 2020b). The Canyonlands were, in prehistoric times, a large, shallow lake (U.S. Forest Service, 2020b). These conditions enabled the over 1,900 foot-prints found in the canyon to become fossilized in stone (U.S. Forest Service, 2020b). Other interesting historical artifacts found at the Canyonlands include Native American art. The exact origin of rock art is unknown and believed to date back to between 375 and 4,500 years (U.S. Forest Service, 2020b).

The Canyonlands are only accessible via the Withers Canyon Trail. The trail is approximately 17 miles roundtrip, and passes the dinosaur tracks, Native American rock art, and multiple historic sites from the 19th century (U.S. Forest Service, 2020b). The historic Dolores Mission and Cemetery can be found

there, along with the Rourke Ranch National Historic District, which is a former cattle ranch established in 1871 (U.S. Forest Service, 2020b).

Holbrook Reservoir State Wildlife Area

Nine miles northwest of La Junta is the Holbrook Reservoir State Wildlife Area (SWA). Consisting of more than 715 acres, the Colorado Division of Wildlife manages the SWA, which includes the Holbrook Lake reservoir and provides many public recreation opportunities, such as hunting, fishing, sailing, and camping (City of La Junta, 2017).

John Martin Reservoir State Park

John Martin Reservoir State Park is located approximately 35 miles east of La Junta, accessible via U.S. Highway 50. The park offers a multitude of outdoor recreation, including boating, fishing, camping, hunting, hiking, biking, horseback riding, jet skiing, and geocaching (Colorado Parks & Wildlife, 2019). The park is home to almost 400 bird species, including endangered and threatened species, such as the piping plover and the least tern (Colorado Parks & Wildlife, 2020).

Cultural and Historical Setting

La Junta means “The Junction” in Spanish and is the site of travel corridor intersections going back to prehistoric times. The history of the area is evident in the nearby Picketwire Canyons which boast one of the United States’ largest prehistoric rock art collections (Otero Junior College, 2020). It is located along a significant Native American trade route. Spanish explorers and settlers arrived in the Southwest in the 1500s seeking gold and expansion of trade in the area, and by the early 1800s the Santa Fe Trail had been popularized as a trade route from Missouri and the east to the city of Santa Fe and beyond to other cities in Mexico (Myers, 2010). The plains of Colorado were home to many Native American tribes including the Comanche, Arapaho, and Cheyenne. The vast herds of bison that roamed the area attracted hunters up and down the Arkansas River and its tributaries. The Bent Brothers established a fort approximately 8 miles to the east of present day La Junta in 1833. Originally a trading post for the buffalo robe trade, the fort soon became a critical destination for supplies and repairs along the Santa Fe Trail (Otero Junior College, 2020).

During this period the Arkansas River was the boundary with Mexico and travelers crossed the river and border at Bent’s Fort (Otero Junior College, 2020). In 1848, after the Mexican-American War, Mexico ceded the territory to the United States. In 1849, William Bent, unhappy with his treatment by the United States Army, started a fire in the powder room which blew up the fort, effectively ending the fur trade in the area (Otero Junior College, 2020). The Santa Fe Trail, however, continued to be an important trade route until the 1880s, when the railroad replaced the trail.



Near the end of 1875, a small settlement was built beside the Arkansas River to assist with the construction of the Santa Fe Railroad. After the railroad was built, the town began to decline. Despite this, the Santa Fe Railroad established a depot and roundhouse at this location. It became the headquarters for the Santa Fe Railroad's Colorado Division in 1879 (Otero Junior College, 2020).

On May 15, 1881, the town was incorporated and named La Junta. La Junta's location at the intersection of ancient trails, settler and explorer trade routes, and modern railroads drew travelers, pioneers, and fortune seekers. La Junta became an important place for produce and cattle shipments (Otero Junior College, 2020). Many people continued to live and thrive in the Arkansas River Valley, establishing farms and homesteads, and the temporary town of railroad workers became a permanent and prosperous city.

Transportation

The Southeast Transportation Planning Region is the transportation policy-making organization for Otero County. It facilitates collaboration among its members in important transportation related planning processes. Its membership includes local governments, stakeholders, and the public at large.

Highways

The current Regional Transportation Plan categorizes La Junta as part of the US-50 regional priority corridor. "A regional priority corridor is a transportation corridor identified as having either a high importance to the region's transportation system or a need for near-term improvements" (City of La Junta, 2017, p. 5-3). Other nearby major routes include US Highway 350 (from the southwest) and State Highways 10 (from the west) and 109 (from the north/south).

Rail Transportation

The railroad is one of La Junta's key features and the main reason for its founding in 1875 (Otero Junior College, 2020). BNSF Railway owns, operates, and maintains the rail line in La Junta, which is crucial for industry and passenger transportation. The rail line connects La Junta to Kansas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Utah, and Nevada (City of La Junta, 2017). BNSF Railway and Amtrak have an agreement in place which allows for passenger transportation. Passenger trains stop at the La Junta Station at 1st Street and Colorado Avenue. Daily, there are two Amtrak trains that stop in La Junta. Both trains run along the Southwest Chief route. This route runs between Chicago and Los Angeles. In 2015, the station had an estimated annual ridership of 7,256 (City of La Junta, 2017).

Air Transportation

The City of La Junta owns and operates the La Junta Municipal Airport (LHX). While the airport does not have regularly scheduled commercial air service, charter service can be arranged. The airport is three miles north of the city. For commercial air carrier service, passengers must travel to Colorado Springs Airport (COS), approximately 130 miles to the west (City of La Junta, 2017).

Bus Transportation

There is a City-operated bus line called La Junta Transit. Its service area includes much of the city, as well as additional service outside of the normal route, upon reservation. The fixed transit line both originates and terminates at the La Junta Senior Center. The bus line runs 8:45 am-3:00 pm, Monday through Friday and is a curb-to-curb service (City of La Junta, 2017).

In addition to La Junta Transit, there are two private bus lines operational in La Junta. There is an interstate bus service that stops daily in La Junta and travels between Wichita, Kansas, and Pueblo, Colorado (City of La Junta, 2017). The interstate bus stops at the Travel Inn (110 E. 1st Street), which is the same location where the Greyhound Lines can be accessed. Greyhound Lines provide a countrywide network of stops for its ridership (City of La Junta, 2017). There is also a regional bus route that stops in La Junta. It is operated by the Colorado Department of Transportation and is referred to as BUSTANG. This route runs between Lamar and Pueblo.

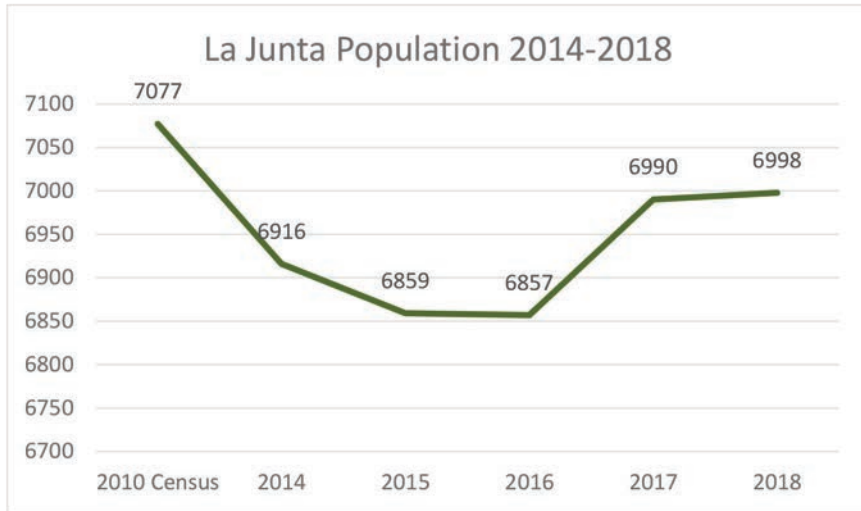


Figure 1: La Junta Population from 2014-2018 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018b)

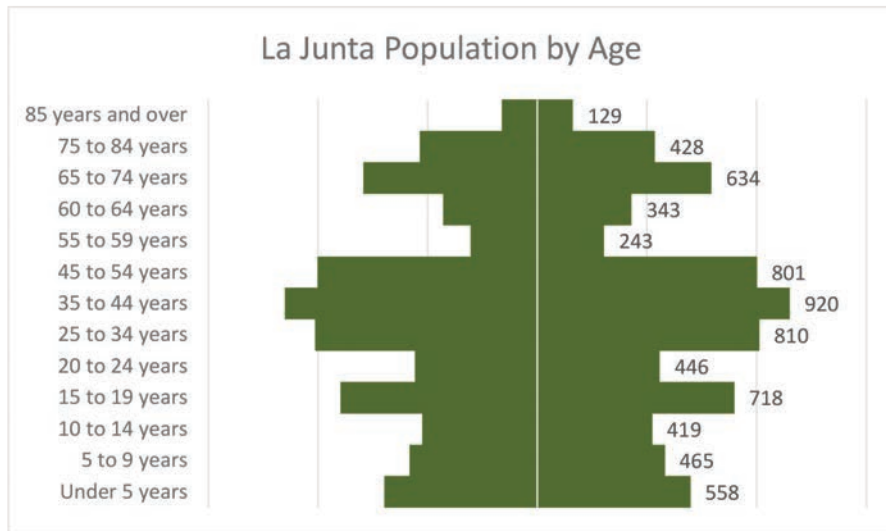


Figure 2: (top right): La Junta Population Age Distribution (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018b)

Social and Economic Factors

Population

The population in La Junta has declined slightly since the 2010 Census. In 2010 La Junta had an estimated 7,077 residents, and by 2018 the city had an estimated 6,998 residents (see Figure 1) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018b). Overall, the La Junta population has remained steady since 1930 with population estimates maintaining approximately 7,000 to 8,000 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020c).

La Junta’s population has larger numbers of older and younger residents than the state as a whole: 31.3% of La Junta’s residents are age 19 or younger compared to 25.4% of Colorado residents and 17.3% of La Junta’s residents are age 65 or older compared to 13.3% of statewide (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018b). See Figure 2 for the age distribution in the City of La Junta.

Females outnumber males in La Junta 52.9% to 47.1%, which is the opposite of the rest of the state, where there are more males (50.3%) than females (49.7%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). La Junta’s residents are almost exclusively white (46.7%) or Hispanic/Latino (46.1%) (see Figure 3) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018b). Other races and ethnicities account for only 8.2% of the city’s population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018b).

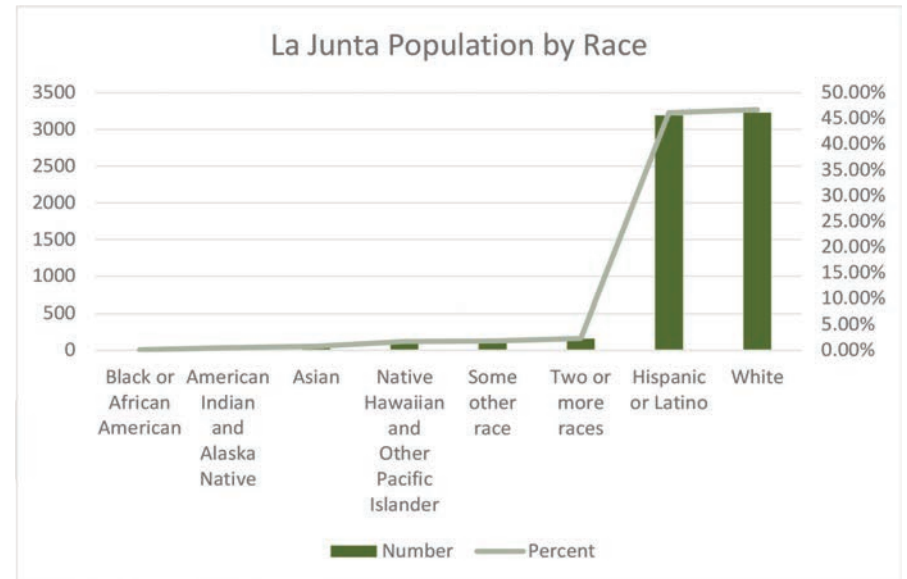


Figure 3: (bottom right): La Junta Population Race and Ethnicity Distribution (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018b)

Education

Nearly 87% of La Junta’s residents have a high school diploma or further education (Figure 4) (U.S Census Bureau, 2018b). This is similar to the state average of 91.4% (U.S Census Bureau, 2018b). Only 18.3% of La Junta residents have a bachelor’s or graduate degree, compared to 40.1% of people statewide (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018b). More La Junta residents have some college (23.9%) or an associate degree (12.1%) than the rest of the state, where 29.8% have attended at least some college or have an associate’s degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018b). This is likely attributable to the presence of Otero Junior College in La Junta.

Economic

Household income in La Junta is well below the state’s average. On average, the median household income in La Junta is \$30,830, compared to Colorado overall at \$68,811 (see Table 2) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018b). Just over 25% of La Junta households have an income of less than \$10,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018b).

	Colorado	La Junta
Median household income	\$68,811	\$30,830
Mean household income	\$92,520	\$40,022
Per capita income	\$36,415	\$17,728

Table 2: Household Income (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018b)

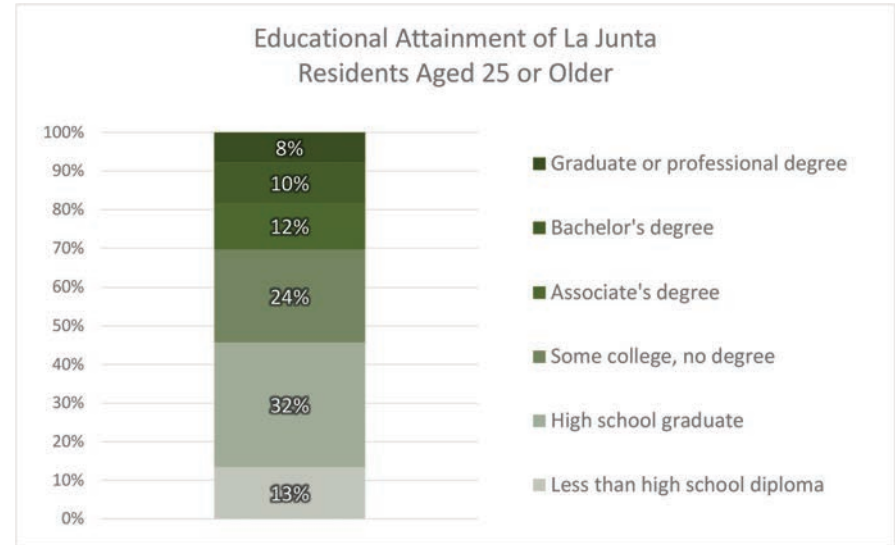


Figure 4: Educational Attainment (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018)

Employment

Educational services is the largest employment sector in La Junta, accounting for 25% of all jobs within the city (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018b). Otero Junior College is the largest employer, with 357 employees (City of La Junta, 2017). In addition to its several technical certificate programs, Otero Junior College has a law enforcement academy and a nursing program. Other leading employment sectors include Public Administration, Arts and Entertainment, and Retail Trade (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018b). Figure 5 demonstrates the percentage of employment in La Junta by industry sector, as determined by the U.S. Census Bureau; these sectors are defined in Table 3.

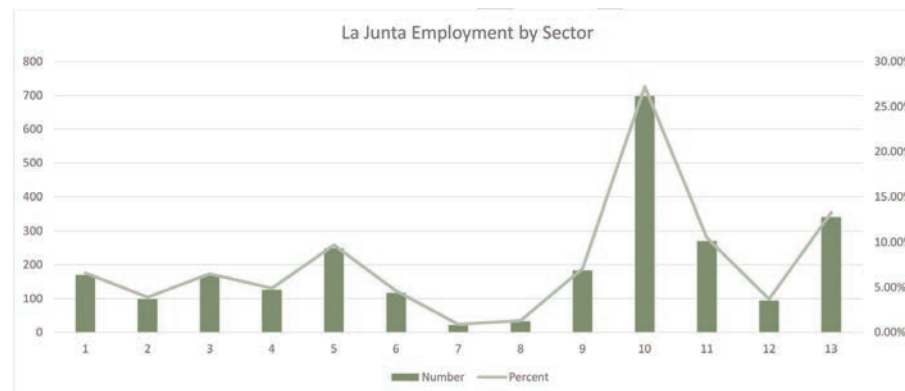


Figure 5: Employment by Sector (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018b)

Index Number	Sector Name
1	Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining
2	Construction
3	Manufacturing
4	Wholesale trade
5	Retail trade
6	Transportation and warehousing, and utilities
7	Information
8	Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing
9	Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services
10	Educational services, and health care and social assistance
11	Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services
12	Other services, except public administration
13	Public administration

Table 3: Employment Sector Key

Major employers in La Junta cover diverse sectors including education, medical services and retirement communities, retail, and industrial (Table 4). North of town there is an industrial park which contains several light industries, the rail-yard, and the airport. Additionally, the city contains a downtown business district.

Employer	Sector (See Table 3)	Employees
Otero Junior College	10	357
Arkansas Valley Regional Medical Center	10	340
Lewis Bolt and Nut	3	240
Wal-Mart	5	240
Otero County	13	165
East Otero School District	10	150
City of La Junta	13	128
Inspiration Field	6	95
Southeast Health Group	10	95
DeBourgh Lockers	3	82
Oliver	3	52
SECOM	6	50
BNSF	6	50
Coffee Holding Company	11	45
SECPA	6	25

Table 4: Leading Employers (City of La Junta, 2017)

Public Health Data and Trends

The 2020 County Health Rankings provide health data from across the nation on a county by county basis. Counties are compared and ranked within states with counties in the 1st quartile considered the healthiest in a factor. Otero County ranks in the 4th (lowest) quartile in the state of Colorado on most rankings (see Table 5).

Outcomes and Factors	Colorado County Rank (of 60)	Quartile
Length of Life	55	4
Quality of Life	53	4
Health Behaviors	56	4
Clinical Care	48	4
Social and Economic Factors	53	4
Physical Environment	50	4

Table 5: Outcome and Factor Rankings for Otero County (County Health Rankings, 2020)

Explanations for each of the health outcomes and factors are as follows (County Health Rankings, 2020):

- *Length of Life*: Measures premature death and life expectancy
- *Quality of Life*: Birth outcomes, showing rates of babies born at low birthweight; and health-related quality of life metrics, looking at how residents rated overall health, physical health, and mental health
- *Health Behaviors*: Actions that individuals take that affect their health
- *Clinical Care*: Access to affordable, quality, and timely healthcare
- *Social and Economic Factors*: Income, education, employment, community safety, and social support that significantly affect how well and how long residents live
- *Physical Environment*: The environment where individuals live, learn, work, and play including quality of air and water, housing, and transit

The health outcomes above, specifically length of life and quality of life, are relevant to parks and recreation because they can often be directly improved through increased access to exercise facilities and natural areas. Health factors can also be positively impacted by parks and recreation. For example, the addition of a park or other green space to a neighborhood contributes to cleaner air and water (Nowak & Heisler, 2020), provides a place for community gatherings and social interaction, and encourages physical activity that may lessen the need for medical care.



Health behaviors among Otero County residents also rank low (County Health Rankings, 2020). Behaviors that are relevant for parks and recreation are listed in Table 6 below.

Behavior	Result	Quartile
Poor or fair health	20%	4
Poor physical health days	4.2%	4
Poor mental health days	4.2%	4
Adult smoking	16%	4
Adult obesity	35%	4
Physical inactivity	23%	4
Access to opportunities to exercise	71%	4

Table 6: Health Behaviors in Otero County Population (County Health Rankings, 2020)

Explanations of health behaviors are as follows (County Health Rankings, 2020):

- Poor or Fair Health: % of adults reporting fair or poor health
- Poor physical health days: Average number of physically unhealthy days reported in past 30 days
- Poor mental health days: Average number of mentally unhealthy days reported in past 30 days
- Adult smoking: % of adults who are current smokers
- Adult obesity: % of adults that report a BMI ≥ 30
- Physical inactivity: % of adults aged 20 and over reporting no leisure-time physical activity
- Access to exercise opportunities: % of population with adequate access to locations for physical activity.

Of particular concern and relevance for La Junta Parks and Recreation is that 23% of county residents are physically inactive and 29% report that they do not have access to exercise facilities (County Health Rankings, 2020). While health behaviors are generally in the control of individuals, not everyone has the means or opportunity to make better choices, making public policies such as the expansion of natural areas and recreation facilities and programs critical to improving these behaviors.

In addition, La Junta has a much higher percent of the population who are disabled than the state or national average. Almost 1 in 5 (18.6%) of La Junta residents has a disability (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020b). Ensuring that this large population has adequate access to recreation facilities and programming may be a significant challenge. As part of this planning effort, a review of accessibility in La Junta Parks and Recreation facilities will be completed to assess accomplishments and uncover opportunities for increasing access to recreation.

Location	% of Disabled Residents
United States	12.6%
Colorado	10.6%
La Junta	18.6%

Table 7: Percentage of Residents with a Disability (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018b)

Summary

La Junta’s population can be described as predominantly middle-aged and mostly white or Hispanic/Latino. Education is the most significant employment sector for the community. La Junta, and Otero County at large, have concerning health statistics, compared to the rest of the state of Colorado. This information is important to consider as it impacts the ways that people in the community interact with the park and recreation system.

PUBLIC INPUT RESPONSES AND ANALYSIS

Stakeholder Interview Analysis

A series of interviews was conducted from May through August 2020 with various stakeholder groups associated with the La Junta parks and recreation system, such as the Rec Board, Youth Commission, City Council, City management staff, and Department staff, among others. Interviews generally lasted for approximately 60 minutes and consisted of 10 open-ended questions posed to the stakeholder groups. The interview instrument is attached in Appendix X. Interview questions were designed to provide an understanding of the strengths of the parks and recreation system and gaps in services, general needs, and community support and to provide a direction to guide the Department in its future vision.

All interview questions and responses are reported in aggregate in Appendix A. A summary of the findings and frequency of responses are detailed below.

Question 1: Impression of La Junta Parks and Recreation

The interviews started with asking participants to describe their general impression of the City's parks and recreation system. Most frequently, participants talked about the athletic programs provided by the Department and the athletic facilities which they maintain. Participants also spoke about other amenities, such as the rodeo grounds, that the Department staff, the parks, and other programs offered.

Question 2: Programs Offered

When asked about the programs offered by the Department, participants expressed an interest in having more programming available, particularly for a wider audience and more ages than the Departments' current programming, which is limited to participants in the kindergarten through sixth grade age range. The other most common response was that some of the athletic facilities need maintenance and repairs. Many participants also expressed a need for more public bathrooms in parks and at athletic facilities. A number of participants acknowledged that the programming is improving but felt that there is too much baseball offered and not enough opportunities for soccer.

Question 3: Quality of Facilities

Many participants considered the facilities to be good and even more claimed La Junta has the best recreational facilities compared to the surrounding communities. Some participants noted the tennis courts, basketball courts, and some playgrounds as needing repair.

Question 4: Community Support

There was significant sentiment among all interview participants that the community strongly supports, appreciates, and is generally happy with the services provided by the Parks and Recreation Department. Participants stated that the parks are widely used, and community members organize and volunteer to support programs. Additionally, the lack of public bathrooms was mentioned, as well as the community's preference for soccer despite the community's numerous baseball fields and lack of officially designated soccer fields.

Question 5: Community Partnerships

The Southeast Health Group was the most mentioned partner to the Parks and Recreation Department. Other local partnerships frequently indicated were the school district, Otero Junior College, and the hospital, along with churches and other local organizations. Multiple participants indicated a desire for local businesses to play a more active role, such as by sponsoring a sports league or team or coordinating with the Department to draw more recreational tourism to the city.

Question 6: Community Health

Interview participants provided many ideas for how the City's Parks and Recreation Department could take a more active role in improving community health. The two most common responses pertained to developing outdoor trails and holding competitive events, such as 5k or 10k runs or obstacle courses. Other suggestions included holding a health fair, Zumba classes at the Senior Center, outdoor workout stations, and building a recreation center with exercise programs.

Question 7: Funding

Interview participants were asked if Department funding should prioritize maintaining existing parks and facilities or be used to develop new parks and facilities. Responses were evenly split in this matter.

Questions 8: Paying for Programming

There are two common approaches to paying for municipal recreation programming: (1) the local government subsidizes the programming or (2) the "pay-to-play" model, which passes the entire cost of the programming onto the individuals who participate in the programming. When asked which model was preferable, nearly all interview participants expressed the need to keep programming as affordable as possible to ensure equitable access for all community members.

Question 9: Trails

Approximately one-third of participants were enthusiastic about developing the trail system in La Junta. About 15% of interview participants, however, were not supportive of investing in La Junta’s trail system. The remaining participants did not express favor or opposition to developing a trail system, and instead simply discussed current and previous efforts to build trails.

Question 10: What would you do?

The final question in the stakeholder interviews provided participants an opportunity to express what they might do differently were they leading the City’s Parks and Recreation Department, as well as what they would keep the same. The two most common responses were to build new sports facilities and expand programming (each encompassing about 20% of participants). Another common response was to fix existing athletic facilities. Others wanted to develop trails and add new amenities.

Summary

The community in general seems to have a positive opinion of the park system and recreational facilities and programming. There appears to be a service gap in recreational programming for teens and adults. Many stakeholders expressed interest in having greater public restroom availability in parks. Nearly all stakeholders indicated that programming should be affordable for all community members. The community seems to be divided on the condition

of existing trails and need for greater trail system development. Division also exists pertaining to prioritizing funding for maintaining existing infrastructure or developing new parks.

Community Survey Analysis

A community survey was conducted in May and June 2020. The survey was designed to gather input from community members on the use, needs, and benefits of the La Junta Parks and Recreation System. The community was informed of the survey by way of the project website, Department social media, and a press release published in the local newspaper. Additionally, information about how to participate in the survey was mailed to residents with their May utility bills.

Surveys were taken online using the Qualtrics analytics software. Paper copies of the survey were mailed to residents upon request. Returned paper surveys were stripped of identifiers and entered into the Qualtrics response database. Eppley Institute staff were able to collect an assortment of qualitative and quantitative data on how survey respondents interact with the City’s Parks and Recreation System, as well as needs and desires for the future. The findings of the survey are explained in the following sections.



Demographics

A total of 470 people completed the survey, 21% of whom do not live within the city limits of La Junta. Most respondents (69%), however, indicated that they had lived in La Junta for 16 years or more. The age distribution of respondents generally tracked with the most recent data available from the American Community Survey Census Data (Figure 1).

An anomaly in the data can be noticed with the age group of 5–17 years. This may be attributed to the respondents who do not live within La Junta’s city limits but do have children in their household who participate in the City’s recreation programs and utilize the City’s park system.

As demonstrated in Figure 2, the two main race and ethnicity categories survey respondents indicated they and members of their household identify as are White (57%) and Hispanic/Latino (27%). Other responses included Native American or Alaska Native, Asian, other, and two or more races. Approximately 5% of the survey respondents preferred not to disclose this information. This indicates a disproportionate response from white community members and not enough response from Hispanic/Latino community members. There are a number of factors that could potentially contribute to this difference in representative survey response. There are many mixed Latino/White families in La Junta and the concept of household identity can be variable. Additionally, there were a number of survey responses from people who do not live in La Junta. They’re responses were included in the reported data because the La Junta parks and recreation system serves people in surrounding communities. This could account for the difference in demographic data between the Census and the community survey.

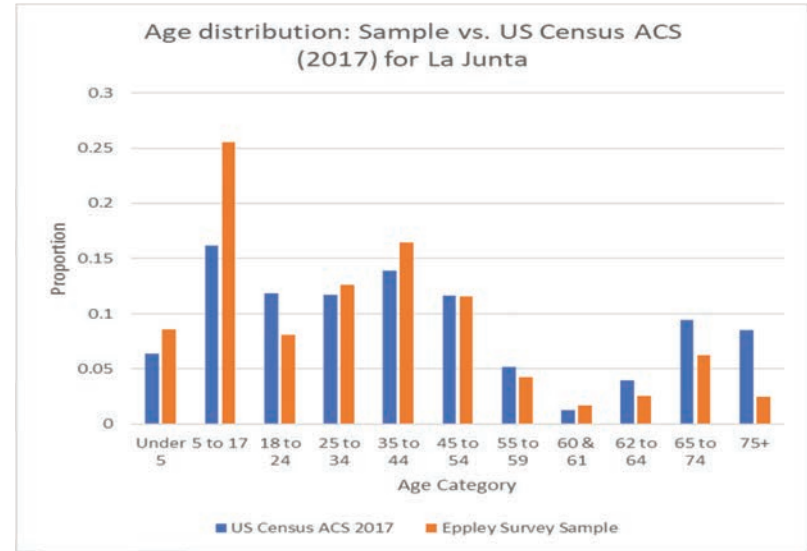


Figure 6: La Junta age distribution – survey results compared to 2017 U.S. Census estimates

Race/Ethnicity	Community %	Survey Response %
Hispanic/Latino	46.1%	27%
White	46.7%	57%

Table 8: Community representation vs survey response

Slightly more than half of the survey participants indicated their annual household income fell within the range of \$25,000–\$74,999, with roughly equal representation between \$25,000–\$49,999 and that of \$50,000–\$74,999 (Figure 3).

Most respondents (68%) indicated that the overall health of their household is good. When asked if poor physical or mental health kept them or a member of their household from doing usual activities (e.g. self-care, work, recreation), 70% of survey participants responded this was only the case for 0–3 days in the last month, 13% responded 4–7 days in the last month, and the remaining 17% of participants indicated that this was the case for more than one week in the last month.

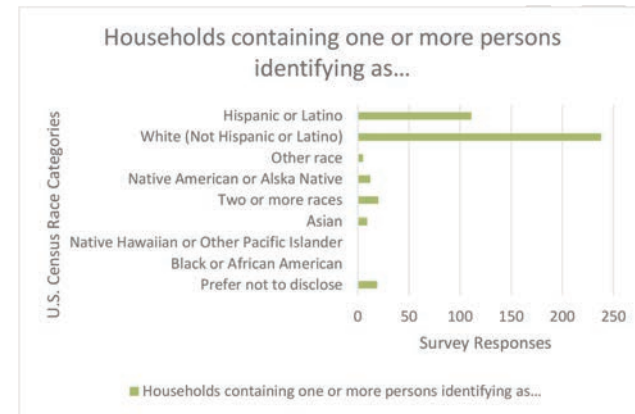


Figure 7: La Junta household race



Figure 8: La Junta household income

Not enough money and not enough time were the most common circumstances that prevented respondents or members of their household from using parks and recreation services. Other circumstances indicated included personal health problems, lack of interest in programs offered by the Department, and not having a park, recreation facility, or trail within a 10-minute walk of their residence.

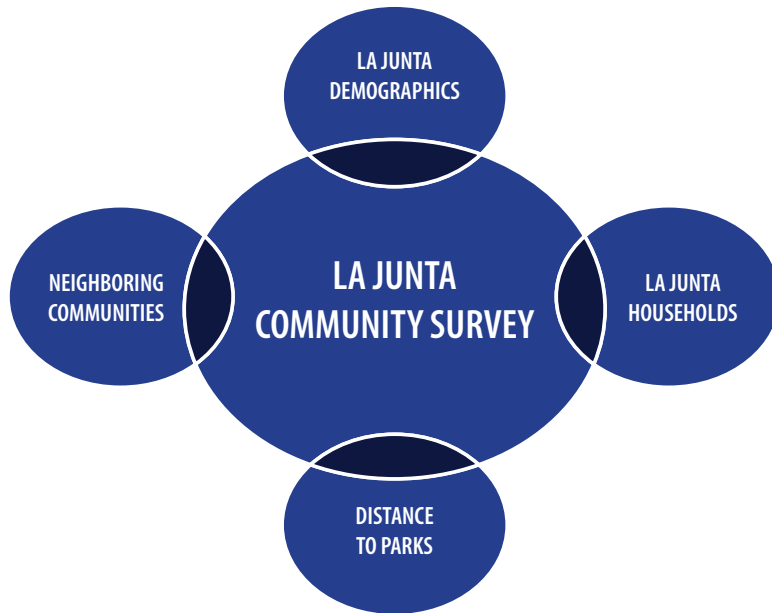


Figure 9: La Junta representation in community survey

Park System

More than 85% of survey participants indicated visiting City Park in the last year. Of those who had visited City Park in the past year, 35% of them indicated that they visited more than 20 times. The two other parks most often visited were Potter Park (53%) and College Overlook/Tippy Martinez Field (54%). Generally, these parks were visited less frequently, with approximately 30% of respondents who indicated visiting them only going between 1 and 5 times in the last year. Even if respondents had not visited these parks, however, most participants were aware of them. Conversely, however, very few respondents were aware of the other parks in the system: as many as 82% of respondents weren't aware of some parks. The outlier in this was Edison Park, which 50% of respondents not aware of and 21% were aware of but had not visited this year. It seems that while Edison Park is, in fact, while utilized, many community members may not be aware of its official name.

Respondents predominantly responded that the parks are in good condition. The only exception to this was Prairie View Park, which was ranked as being in poor condition. Lack of time was the most common reason people gave for why they haven't visited specific parks. Prairie View Park was again an outlier, as the most common reason for not visiting it was that it's too far away.

Survey respondents who indicated that they were aware of specific parks but their household had not visited them in the past year had the opportunity to provide reasons for why they chose not to use the parks. In these responses, City Park was an outlier. As most survey participants had visited City Park in the past year, the few who had not predominantly listed the COVID-19 pandemic as their reason for not visiting the park.

Responses pertaining to the COVID-19 outbreak excluded, some other major themes emerged in responses pertaining to why survey participants had not visited City parks. These themes can be broken down into the following categories:

1. Interest, relevance, reason to go. Either the respondent or their family were not interested in the place, what was offered at the park was not relevant to them, or they reported no reason to go (202 responses)
2. The park was too far away or another park was closer, more suitable or appealing (88 responses)
3. Lack of appeal (79 responses)
4. Either the respondent did not know the park existed or they reported forgetting that it was there (57 responses)
5. Unsafe (28 responses)
6. Disrepair and functionality of facilities (26 responses)
7. Lack of shade or weather protection (23 responses)
8. Lack of restrooms or their usability (14 responses)
9. Dirty (13 responses)
10. Lack of enjoyability (2)
11. Lack of seating (1 response)

These responses need to be considered in the context of their proportion to the entire survey as well as the number of total responses pertaining to each park. Table 9 below breaks this down.

	Interest, relevance, reason to go	Restrooms	Weather and shade	Dirty	Unsafe	Disrepair and functionality	Location and distance	Enjoyability	Knowledge and forgetting	Appeal	Another park	Seating
CITY	20	13	7	13	7	7	7	0	0	0	7	0
POTTER	76	1	1	0	0	0	3	1	10	4	0	0
COLLEGE	51	0	1	0	3	1	9	1	6	6	13	1
REDCRANE	73	0	5	0	9	0	18	0	5	0	5	0
PRAIRIE	62	0	0	0	0	15	0	0	8	0	0	0
EDISON	75	0	0	0	3	3	8	0	8	3	0	0
PIKE	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	50	0	0
TRAIN	76	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11	5	3	0
LIVWELL	66	0	9	0	3	0	9	0	9	11	6	0

Table 9: Responses for not visiting individual parks, grouped by major theme

Thirteen people (out of the 470 who took the survey) indicated dirtiness as the reason they didn't visit City Park. For no other park was dirtiness listed as a factor for not visiting. One person indicated a lack of seating available in College Park as why they don't go there. Out of the 79 participants who indicated a lack of appeal, 50 of those were referring to Prairie View Park. After removing comments pertaining to the spread of COVID-19, "lack of interest, relevance, or reason to go" was by far the most common reason why survey respondents don't visit various parks. Nearly half of all total survey takers indicated this.

Comments invoking the theme "interest, relevance, or reason to go" were classified into two types: Type A, in which the respondent acknowledged some value or attraction at the park but said that it was not relevant to them (mainly due to children aging out of team sports or use of playgrounds) or Type B, where the comment indicated that there was nothing at the park that attracted them or was of interest. Included in this coding were comments that apparently referred to team sports having been cancelled due to COVID-19.

In the following tables, "interest, relevance, or reason to go" are broken out by these types. Count of comments invoking "interest, relevance, or reason to go" by type by park. **Type A includes comments saying that what is there is not attractive or interesting, while Type B is there is nothing there to draw me.** Among the three large parks, Potter and College/Tippy had the greatest proportion of Type A comments, probably due to the large proportion of the parks devoted to team sports facilities.

Park	Interest Type A	Interest Type B
City Park	1	2
Potter Park	30	30
College Overlook Park	12	22
Red Crane Park	8	8
Prairie View Park	3	5
Edison Park	4	23
Train Hill Park	2	25
Livewell Park	2	21

Table 10: Lack of interest type broken down by park

Survey participants had the opportunity to write responses to an open-ended question asking what else they might want in or from their parks. A list summarizing the responses follows:

1. Clean, safe, and functioning bathrooms with running water (99 responses)
2. Clean, safe play and playground areas for children with new equipment, especially free of animal waste and garbage (70 total responses)
3. Clean places to sit, dine, and gather, preferably with shade, preferably in the form of gazebos that are in good repair
 - a. Places to sit, including picnic tables, benches, and spectator seating at ballparks, were mentioned 61 times
 - b. The need for shade was mentioned 30 times
 - c. Gazebos were mentioned 24 times
 - d. Pavilions were mentioned 4 times

4. Clean, cheerful, green, weed-free, and well-maintained landscaping with plenty of shade trees
5. Maintenance and cleanliness of parks were mentioned 39 total times
6. Landscaping was mentioned 30 times
7. Tennis (46 courts) and basketball courts (35 responses) that are newly surfaced and well-equipped
8. Level, well-appointed (e.g., with appropriate lighting, fencing, markings) ball fields with shaded seating for spectators and players (e.g., in dug-outs); newly-built or renovated, capacious, and well-marked restrooms with running water, well-equipped concession areas, and new, safe announcer boxes (27 responses)

While relatively small in proportion to the total number of survey participants, it can still be derived from these responses that people who interact with the City’s Parks and Recreation System care a great deal about it, want to use it, and want it to consist of quality amenities.

Recreation

The recreation amenities described by survey participants as being used very often were the City’s pool and playgrounds. Picnic areas, trails and walking paths, and gazebos were predominately described as being used somewhat often. Most responses indicated that the other recreation amenities offered by the City were mostly not being used. Similarly, when asked what recreational facilities and amenities are used by households to increase their health and well-being, the three most common responses were trails and walking paths, the community pool, and playgrounds.

Overwhelmingly, survey participants responded that they found it very important to increase public restroom availability in La Junta parks. Other amenities that were common responses included the community pool (outdoor and indoor), playgrounds, trails (paved and not paved), and a community recreation center.

Half of the survey respondents or members of their household had participated in recreation programs and services provided by the City in the past year. By a wide margin, the most common reason why survey respondents did not participate in the Department’s recreation programming was due to a lack of children in their household. This tracks with the breakdown by household demographics: generally, households with children are the most likely to have someone who has participated in a City recreation program. Households with only seniors present occasionally participated in recreation programs, while adult-only, non-senior households were the least likely to have participated in City recreation program. With 78% of respondents indicating lack of children

in the household as the primary reason for not participating in the recreation programs offered, there may be an opportunity for the City to diversify its programming opportunities for community members of different ages. Other common reasons for not participating in recreation programming were that it is too far away or respondents were unaware of available programming.

Of those who do use the City’s recreation programming and amenities, 82% of respondents were almost evenly split between “satisfied” (42%) and “very satisfied” (40%) with their use of the community pool. Similarly, with the youth sports programs, 69% of respondents were “satisfied” (41%) or “very satisfied” (28%). Another 18% of respondents reported being moderately satisfied with the City’s youth sports programs.

Participants taking the survey were presented with a list of recreation amenities that the City could potentially offer and participants were asked to indicate which potential options were of interest to them. Participants were able to select as many of the options as they wanted. The selections that received an “important” rank by 60% or more of survey participants are as follows

- farmers’ market
- youth sports leagues and programs
- fitness, health, and wellness programs
- public events, festivals, and picnics
- concerts and movies
- youth summer day camps
- after-school programs
- programs for people with disabilities

In terms of funding priorities, participants were presented with options for how they would prefer additional funds to be allocated. On a scale of 1 to 8, with number 1 being the most important and 8 being the least important, participants were asked to rank the following possibilities:

- maintain existing parks and trails
- renovate the grounds and infrastructure in existing parks and trails
- add new equipment to existing parks
- facilitate and provide additional recreation programs
- acquire new parkland and open space
- construct new walking and biking trails
- construct new parks

The two options that received the most number 1 rankings also had the highest number 2 rankings. These were renovating the grounds and infrastructure in existing parks and trails and maintaining existing parks and trails. This indicates that survey respondents strongly prefer to allocate funding to maintain and improve existing parks, trails, and infrastructure. This is reinforced by the fact that the option that received the lowest significant ranking, by a wide margin, was constructing new parks.

There were other interesting findings that came out of this question. Survey participants seemed to feel lukewarm about adding new equipment to existing

parks and additional recreational programs, with both of those ranking solidly in the middle of the scale. The survey participants seem to be divided, however, on the importance of constructing new walking and biking trails. Almost the same number of respondents ranked this as a 1 as those that marked it a 5.

Table 11 contrasts the ways that survey participants currently learn about the Department’s services and programs compared to how they would prefer to learn about services and programs. Response are listed from most common to least common.

Currently Learn	Would Prefer to Learn
Flyers/posters at parks and recreation facilities	Flyers/posters at parks and recreation facilities
From friends and neighbors	Television
Blogs	Facebook or other social media
Does not receive information	Newspaper articles
City of La Junta Parks and Recreation website	Radio
	Conversations with Parks and Recreation staff
	Blogs

Table 11: How the community currently learns about Department programs and services compared to how they would prefer to be informed

In addition to the communication methods depicted by the survey respondents, the Department also utilizes Facebook, the local newspaper, local radio, and distribution of promotional flyers at the schools as ways of communicating with the public.

Survey participants were asked to rank the three most important benefits that their household receives from parks, trails, and recreation programs, facilities, and services. The four benefits with the most endorsements by survey participants are:

- making La Junta more desirable place to live
- improved mental health and reduced stress
- improved physical fitness
- enhanced community appearance

Other benefits that were highly ranked by survey participants included: helping reduce crime, helping attract new residents and businesses, and improving diet and nutrition.

GEOSPACIAL ANALYSIS

Due to the beneficial role parks play in advancing health, quality of life, local economies, and environmental well-being, the Trust for Public Land, Urban Land Institute, and National Recreation and Park Association, along with several other prominent national public health, environmental, and planning agencies, advocate that communities ought to strive to have parks within a ten-minute walk for all their residents. This effort to achieve equitable access to parks has been endorsed by more than 300 mayors across the United States.

Using data available through ArcGIS software, the project team analyzed the park density in La Junta (Figure 10). A spatial analysis indicates that approximately 98.8% of the population of La Junta lives within a .5-mile/10-minute walk of a general use city park or trail. Note that while La Junta has more parks than what is captured in the map analysis, many of parks in the City’s inventory are primarily ballfields or other specialty recreational spaces. The analysis of walking time to a general-purpose park (such as City Park) would look different than including all recreational facilities and amenities.

This analysis utilizes a radial distance buffer. This is appropriate in this case because of the small size of the community, the compactness of the main populated area, and the regularity of the street grid. Once La Junta parks were classified (see table above, it was determined that only three parks in the City’s system are just general green areas with some additional amenities, varying by park (some include playgrounds, tennis courts, etc.). The three general purpose parks are City Park, College Overlook, and Edison Park. Red Crane was excluded because it is essentially only a playground without general space. GIS data was not available for Prairie View Park.

NAME	Type
Tippy Martinez Ball Park	Ballfield
22nd St. Ball Park	Ballfield
Veterans' Field	Ballfield
Prairie View Park	Ballfield
Potter Park	Ballfield
City Park	General Purpose
College Overlook Park	General Purpose
Edison Park	General Purpose
Municipal Golf Course	Golf Course
Red Crane Tot Park	Playground
Rodeo Grounds	Rodeo Grounds
Community Pool	Water Park

Table 12: Internal classification of La Junta parks

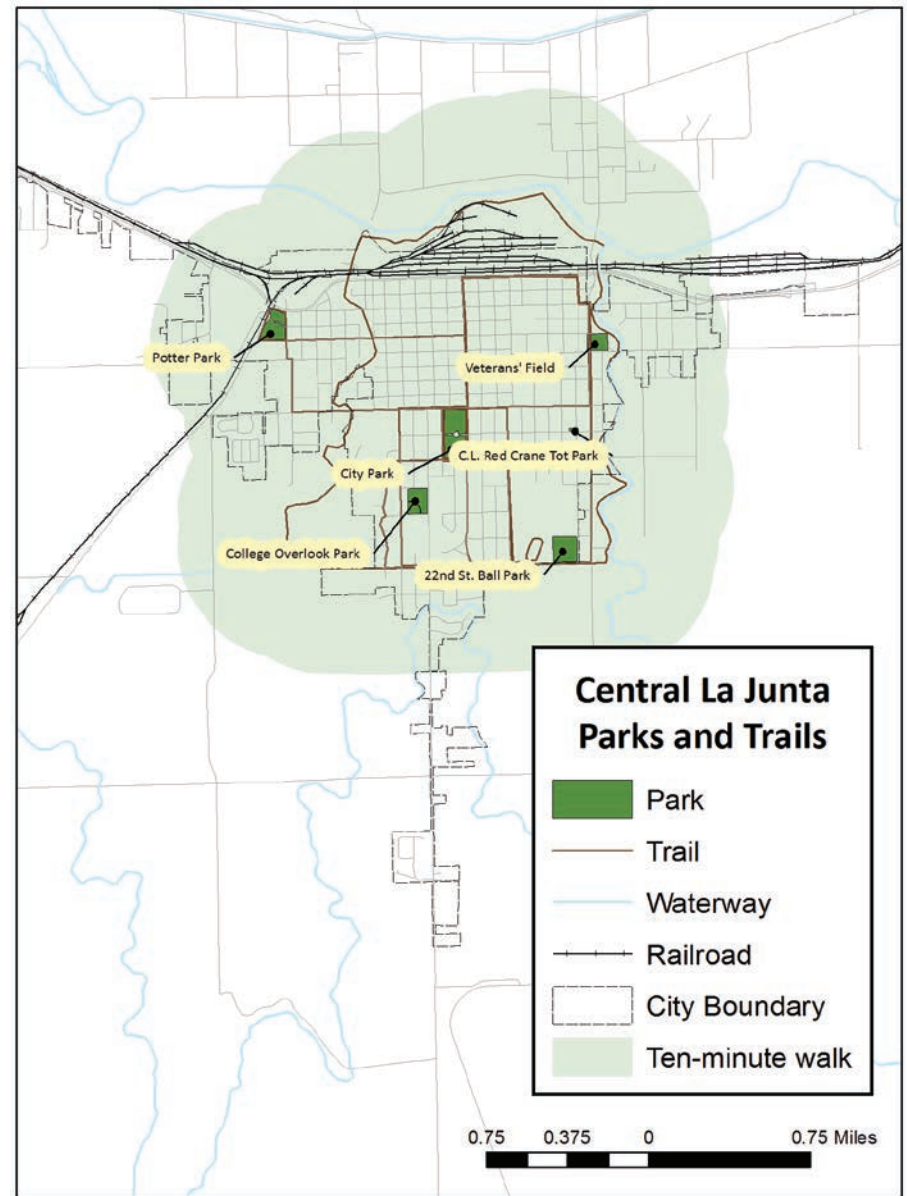


Figure 10 (right): Map of central La Junta parks and trails

The distance from each of the three general use parks to each Census block (or partial block) within the city limits was calculated next. Using the population in each, a histogram was developed to account for the distance of each individual counted in the 2010 Census to a general-purpose park.

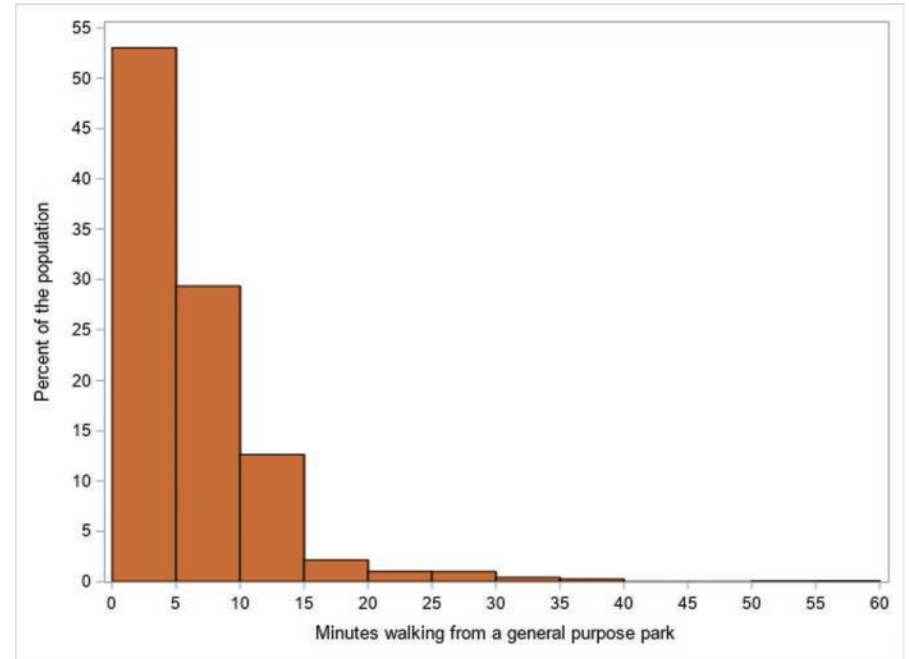


Figure 11 (right): Histogram demonstrating percentile of La Junta's population living within a 10-minute walk from a general-purpose park

CONDITIONS AND ACCESSIBILITY ASSESSMENT

Introduction

In August 2020, Eppley Institute staff traveled to La Junta to assess the conditions and accessibility of the City's parks and recreation facilities. Eppley Institute staff, accompanied by Department staff, spent three days assessing the parks and recreation facilities. Assessments included an inventory of amenities and use, as well as a broad-based approach to accessibility design. The findings are separated below based on parks, recreation facilities, and trails.

Parks

Brick and Tile Park

At the time of the assessment, the Intergenerational Park was in early stages of development. The proposed park is slated to be built on the north side of 10th Street, across from the Disc Golf Course. The proposed park design includes leisure recreation space as well as public art installations and wellness stations.

The park will serve as one of the trailheads for the Anderson Trail. Design information is attached in Appendix B.

Cemetery

The Department is responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the Calvary and Fairview Cemeteries. Historically, the Calvary Cemetery has been used for Catholic burials and the Fairview Cemetery for Protestant burials. The cemeteries do not have automated sprinklers and the current sprinkler system is approximately 80 years old. The major thoroughfares in Fairview are paved and approximately 75% of the thoroughfares in Calvary are paved, although the paving in both is in significant need of repair. During the course of this planning process, the Department has paved two of the thoroughfares in the cemetery: one paving was a repair and the other was new paving. Many community members use the cemetery for recreational walking.

City Park

City Park is by far the most used park in the City of La Junta’s park system. The north and south boundaries are 10th and 14th Streets, respectively, and the east and west boundaries are Colorado and Park Avenues, respectively. The park received an historic designation in the 1990s, which limits new construction and significant renovations to the site. The stonework on the buildings adjacent to Colorado Avenue and the pedestrian paths are all original and were constructed by the Works Projects Administration in the late 1930s.

City Park has numerous active and passive recreational opportunities. There are pedestrian paths, picnic tables and benches, and open green space. The paths are a combination of paved and gravel. The paths and greenspace are exceptionally well maintained. There are trash receptacles throughout the park but no amenities that support recycling. A pond near the northern end of the park is used for fishing and stocked twice a year. This amenity significantly increased in popularity during the spring of 2020 when many recreational facilities were closed due to the pandemic. There is a bandstand near the eastern entrance of the park. In proximity to the bandstand is the historic caretaker’s house and two, small stone buildings that are restrooms. The restrooms have been closed since the 1990s and are currently under renovation.

City Park contains a set of basketball courts and a set of tennis courts. The basketball courts are in good condition, but the tennis courts have fallen into disrepair and are currently unusable for their intended use. The Department occasionally uses this fenced-in space for other activities, such as during the Early Settlers Festival, which is usually held in City Park in late September. City Park also has a skatepark which was built approximately 20 years ago. While it is currently in decent condition, it hasn’t had any maintenance work done to it and is coming up on later in the infrastructure’s lifecycle and will require maintenance soon.

There is a playground in City Park which has two play structures, a swing set, and sand surfacing. The play structures seem to be in good condition, with only minor aesthetic degradation due to length of time outdoors. There are a couple picnic shelters in the park which are available for public use and can be reserved at no charge for private events. There is one beach-volleyball courts and horseshoe pits. Near the northern entrance of the park there is a small, brick-paved plaza with flowerbeds and other decorative features, including an historic park designation marker.

There are mixed levels of accessibility throughout the park. It is recommended that a detailed accessibility assessment be conducted for City Park to assist the City in determining a strategy for increasing the park’s accessibility.



Figure 12: Historic stone structure in City Park is being renovated for public use.



Figure 13: Dilapidated tennis courts in City Park.



Figure 14: Playground in City Park

College Overlook Park

College Overlook Park is located along San Juan Avenue across the street from Otero Junior College. It is adjacent to the Tippy Martinez Stadium, which was named after the Major League Baseball player from La Junta, who was a relief pitcher for the Baltimore Orioles when they won the world series in 1983. College Overlook Park contains greenspace and a picnic shelter with picnic tables. There is a paved pedestrian path that traverses a good portion of the park. The terrain, even on the paved path, is a bit hilly which might pose a challenge for individuals with different mobility capabilities. There are no designated accessible parking spaces.

Like City Park, College Overlook Park has the same number of tennis and basketball courts. Conversely, however, the tennis courts at College Overlook Park are in excellent condition, whereas the basketball courts very much need repairs. The playground contains a play structure, which at the time of the assessment, was partially closed for repairs. Since that time, the Department has replaced some decking and tubing where parts of the play structure had been closed. The playground surfacing consisted of gravel. It is recommended that a detailed accessibility assessment be conducted for College Overlook Park to assist the City in determining a strategy for increasing the park's accessibility.

Edison Park

Edison Park is predominantly open green space. It also has a picnic shelter with picnic tables and a trash receptacle. It is a neighborhood park located between Edison and Rice Avenues, between 7th and 8th Streets, near the La Junta Middle School. The open green space at Edison Park is used for the soccer youth leagues offered by the Department, although there is not a formally designated soccer field at the park. There is no designated parking, but on-street parking is available to park users. This park is well maintained, its amenities in good condition, and is generally accessible.

Although Edison Park is widely used by the community, particularly for soccer. It became apparent in the community survey, however, that many residents that Edison Park is the name of this neighborhood park. Therefore, it may benefit the community to put up signs with the park name at the park.

Live Well Park

Live Well Park is a mid-block plot along Santa Fe Avenue. It is a vacant lot surfaced by concrete slabs. There's a metal gate and open entrance at the sidewalk, some scattered benches, and a city map. Redevelopment initiatives are underway for this lot which can be found in Appendix C.



Figure 15: Basketball courts in College Overlook Park



Figure 16: Playground at College Overlook Park



Figure 17: Edison Park



Figure 18: Pikes Park

Pikes Park

Pikes Park is a landscaped strip at the intersection of Highway 50, West 3rd Street, and Belmont Avenue. It contains the Welcome to La Junta sign, flag poles, and a commemorative plaque to the American explorer Zebulon Pike. A symbolic gateway to the City, this park is currently not designed for recreational use. In the future, the City could consider adding a sidewalk system around the perimeter and Pikes Park could act as a connector to other trails.

Potter Park

Potter Park primarily consists of a baseball stadium. The baseball field and associated practice features seem to be in good condition. The spectator stands are a bit weathered and lack accessible options. There are parking options along the west and north sides of the park and on-street parking along the east side of the park. There are no designated accessible parking spaces.

Outside of the stadium there is open green space with picnic tables and a sidewalk that follows three-quarters of the park boundaries. There are horseshoe pits in this park as well. This is a popular area for people to come enjoy lunch during the week. It is intended to eventually have the pedestrian route around the perimeter of the path connect to other community trails.



Figure 19: Entrance to Potter Park



Figure 20: Open green space with picnic tables and horseshoe pits at Potter Park

Prairie View Park

Prairie View Park is in a neighborhood south side of the city, off of San Juan Avenue, in what used to be a military air force base. The base was active during World War II and closed in the 1980's. After its close, it was converted into a residential neighborhood.

Prairie View Park has two distinct elements: a baseball field and a playground and picnic space. The baseball field is adjacent to Burshears Boulevard where it intersects with Kiva Court. The field is not maintained and is encompassed by a chain link fence. Outside of the fence is a picnic table and a set of bleachers, neither of which are accessible nor in good condition. There is no designated parking for the baseball field, but on-street parking is available. There are no curb cuts or accessible ways for someone to access the field from the street.

The other feature of Prairie View Park, the playground and picnic area, has two entrances off Kiva Court and one entrance off Burshears Boulevard. The park space is in the center of the block, surrounded by a wooden fence, with residential housing on all sides. It is accessed by paved paths that go between houses. The sidewalks are sloped at the park entrances, allowing accessible access from the street. There's a paved path that runs along the perimeter of the enclosed park and benches throughout along the path. The trees surrounding the perimeter of the park are overgrown and occasionally impede the path.

There's open green space, a picnic shelter, and playground area. The picnic shelter has concrete slab surfacing. There are picnic tables and trash receptacles under the picnic shelter. The picnic shelter is in significant disrepair that needs to be addressed. The playground has sand surfacing and is surrounded by wood logs in various stages of degradation. The playground contains a play structure and a swing set. The rubber seats on the swing set need to be replaced. The Department has purchased new, replacement play structure to be installed at Prairie View Park, including new unitary surfacing, which will increase accessibility.



Figure 21: Baseball field, picnic table, and spectator bleachers at Prairie View Park



Figure 22: Picnic shelter at Prairie View Park



Figure 23: Playground at Prairie View Park

Red Crane Park

Red Crane Park is a neighborhood pocket park, located on the north side of E 12th Street near the intersection with Bradish Avenue. This park predominantly consists of a playground containing one main play structure with slides, two metal arched climbing structures, a swing set, and a picnic shelter. It has a picnic table, a bench, and a trash receptacle. The surfacing is predominantly sand when a unitary surface surrounds the main play structure and a path connected to the sidewalk. The park is encircled by a chain link fence and has a metal archway at the entrance. There is no designated parking, but on-street parking is available to park users.

The play equipment at Red Crane Park is outdated and could benefit from upgrades, although parts of it were recently painted by the local boy scouts troupe. The metal archway also has an aged appearance. The park is accessible from the sidewalk, but the sidewalk does not have curb cuts or slopes, creating accessibility barriers. The swing set does not have an accessible swing and the playground structures do not provide wheelchair transfer sites.



Figure 24: Playground at Red Crane Park

Santa Fe Plaza

Santa Fe Plaza is located at the corner of Santa Fe Avenue and W 1st Street. It has historically been used for festivals and the pavilion for concert events. There are brick paved paths throughout the paths that circle a flowerbed with native species plantings. There are picnic tables and trash receptacles throughout the park. There's also public art by local artists throughout the art. A decorative fence runs along the north and west park boundaries and there's a covered kiosk where the converge. Limited off-street parking is available along the southern boundary of the park. There are no designated accessible parking spaces.



Figure 25: Santa Fe Plaza

Train Hill Park

Train Hill Park is historical landmark in the community, located at the intersection of Highway 50 and Barnes Avenue. It contains a historic train and car marked 1024. This park is a tourist attraction, drawing in visitors off of Highway 50 to stop and learn about the city and its heritage. The kiosk provides historical information about the city and some of its changes over time.

There is a large, paved parking lot. Train Hill Park is accessible by way of Warren or Barnes Avenues. Currently, there are no designated accessible parking spaces. In the future, Train Hill Park will serve as a trailhead for Anderson Trail. Picnic tables could be added to encourage further use of this space.



Figure 26: Historic train at Train Hill Park



Figure 27: 22nd Street baseball field



Figure 28: Spectator stands at 22nd Street baseball stadium

Recreation Facilities

22nd Street

This baseball stadium is located on 22nd Street and Highway 109. It has a turf field and is primarily used by Otero Junior College. The field does not have lights, which limits when it can be used for practices, games, and tournaments. The parking lot is unpaved. The spectator stands, dugouts, etc. are all in good condition, although the general accessibility of the facility could be improved. It is recommended that the City undergo a detailed accessibility assessment for this recreational facility.

Clay Hills Flying Saucer Disc Golf Course

The Disc Golf Course was established in 2017. The City has owned the site since the 1960s, which remains primarily natural. Efforts to control invasive species are ongoing. The incorporation of natural features and repurposed items gives the Disc Golf Course a rustic ambiance but presents significant accessibility barriers for people who have physical mobility limitations.

Golf Course

The Parks and Recreation Department manages and maintains a 9-hole golf course, located north of the city off Highway 109. It is part of the City's industrial park. La Junta's semi-arid climate necessitates that significant resources be dedicated to maintaining the golf course greens and landscaping. The Department could adjust landscaping practices to be more reflective of the climate in an effort to reduce staff time and resources required for maintenance.

The golf course has a small clubhouse where guests can purchase tee time and rent golf carts. The clubhouse is not accessible for someone with limited mobility or dependent on an assistive device for their mobility.



Figure 29: Clay Hills Flying Saucer Disc Golf Course



Figure 30: One of the course holes at the disc golf course

Rodeo Grounds

The Department is responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the municipal rodeo grounds. The grounds are leased to Otero Junior College nine months out of the year for their rodeo club. The other three months of the year, the rodeo is used by local youth clubs. Built in the 1950s, the rodeo consists of a ¼ mile track, spectator stands, a concession stand, announcer stand, bucket shoots, and multiple stock holding pens. Currently, the Ace of Spades is fund raising for a shade cover for the spectator stands.

The rodeo grounds have undergone numerous renovations over the last decade to update and improve the facilities. There are still updates and maintenance needed to the rodeo grounds, including back stock and holding pens, update the boxes and load-in shoots, improve the roping area, add additional pens, and repairs to the pasture fence. A shade structure for the spectator stands could also be added. There are numerous accessibility concerns throughout the site that should be addressed after a thorough assessment.

Senior Center

The Senior Center is located downtown on E 2nd Street near Raton Avenue. It is located near the docking station for La Junta’s bus system, which provides curb-to-curb service for residents. The Senior Center provides recreational activities for the entire community, although its programming is generally aimed at and utilized by senior citizens in the community and surrounding areas. The community’s Meal-on-Wheels program also operates out of the Senior Center. The facility is in excellent condition and is compliant with accessibility codes.

The Senior Center has over 500 members and before the pandemic was serving approximately 100 members per day, with monthly totals ranging between 1,300-1,700 people. The facility consists of a main community room and multiple, classroom-sized rooms for programming. The main community room, which includes a kitchen, open space, tables and chairs, and shelves full of books and board games. The open space is used for the Friday night dances (complete with a live band), morning exercise classes and walking club, and other community activities. There’s a projector used for movie nights. It was attempted to be used for pickleball but isn’t quite large enough. The kitchen is used for monthly breakfasts and dinners provided to members. The monthly dinner is usually a potluck and has speakers on various topics. Each year, the Senior Center hosts a Thanksgiving and Christmas dinner. Historically, they have also hosted a Halloween carnival. The main room is also rented out to the public for events such as birthdays and weddings.

Numerous programming activities are available to the community through the Senior Center. There are community classes, some of which include: pottery,



Figure 31: Spectator stands at the Rodeo Grounds



Figure 32: La Junta Rodeo Grounds



Figure 33: The main community room at the Senior Center

crochet, quilting, and leather crafting. There are Scrabble, bingo, billiards, dominos, and other gaming events. Exercise classes such as tai chi and Zumba are also offered. There is an instructional gardening club on Saturdays. Members pay an annual fee for participation in meals and activities and any member of the public can participate for \$2.50 per class or event. Historically, the Senior Center has organized regional daytrips for its members, seeking out scenic destinations and other cultural events.

Swimming Pool

The outdoor, community swimming pool, located next to Potter Park, is one of the city's most highly used recreational facility. Built in the 1950s and renovated in the year 2000, when the pool is open in the summer it hosts approximately 700 people per day. This includes open swim, swimming lessons, and private parties. One of the ends of the pool has a zero-entry design, which is helpful to people with lower or limited mobility. Having a detailed accessibility audit completed would be beneficial for this significant community asset.

Tippy Martinez Stadium

Tippy Martinez Stadium is a softball/baseball field adjacent to College Overlook Park. It shares the parking lot for College Overlook Park and does not have a paved route from the street to the field. It is used by Otero Junior College and by the high school softball teams, as well as for youth softball and baseball. There are several measures the Department could implement to improve the accessibility of Tippy Martinez Stadium for people with limited mobility. The Department should have the stadium undergo a detailed accessibility audit in conjunction with College Overlook Park.



Figure 34: La Junta community swimming pool, water slide, and picnic tables under shade structure



Figure 35: La Junta community swimming pool zero entry access end



Figure 36: Tippy Martinez commemorative sign



Figure 37: Tippy Martinez field

Veterans Field

This baseball field is located at the intersection of Highway 109 and E 6th Street. One of the city’s older stadiums, it is used primarily as a practice field for the high school softball league. It includes spectator stands, announcer stand, and designated team areas. The facility is aging but in generally good condition. In terms of accessibility, the Department should look at increasing accessibility measures for the stadium seating, among other measures.

Trails

Color Walking Routes

City documents depict a sections of the city’s sidewalk system as designated pedestrian routes, in order to encourage more mobility across the city. The designated routes are intended to help resident track how far they’ve walked, biked, or rolled. These five routes have the color-associated names:

- Green Trail – 3.2 miles
- Orange Trail – 2.8 miles
- Blue Trail – 3 miles
- Purple Trail – 3.8 miles
- White Trail – 2.5 miles

Despite the designation of these routes, there are no signs or markers indicating these routes to the public. The City would benefit from providing infrastructure to help delineate these routes to help create public awareness and encourage use. A wayfinding system of signage would help bring awareness to the designated pedestrian routes, encourage people to actively use them, as well as promote learning about community health and local trails.

Anderson Trail

Anderson Trail is slated to be developed in conjuncture with Brick and Tile Park. Construction will begin early in the year 2021 and is anticipated to be completed by the year 2023. The goal for the Anderson Trail development is to have the trail head at Brick and Tile Park at 10th Street and to continue north Train Hill Park. The goal is to eventually have the trail extend north all the way to the Arkansas River. The trail will be a paved, multi-use pedestrian path with both natural and urban features.



Figure 39: Veterans Field



Figure 38: Bleachers at Veterans Field

BENCHMARKING ANALYSIS

Introduction and Inclusion Analysis

Benchmarking is a vital process that allows organizations to compare their assets, programs, policies, and other criteria to those of peer organizations. Such comparisons are often used by agencies to evaluate themselves and, ultimately, plan better for growth and improvement. In this analysis, initial criteria were selected by the master planning team in conjunction with the City of La Junta Parks and Recreation Department. Additional points of interest were identified from data provided by the selected peer agencies and compiled for this report.

The City of La Junta has not been growing in recent years but intends to reverse that trend and become a destination for families and business growth. The La Junta Parks and Recreation Department plays a key role in this by providing and maintaining facilities that are attractive and predict the needs of the population. Anticipating the City's potential for growth and keeping the department's goals in mind, the master planning team selected peer benchmarking cities for comparison based on geographical location in Colorado, in order to gauge the level of service that exists in towns and cities most similar to La Junta.

Using these criteria, three peer agencies were selected for comparison and were contacted to complete a survey of approximately 45 questions. The following communities were included in the final analysis, listed in order of increasing population:

- Cortez, Colorado
- Craig, Colorado
- Eaton, Colorado

Data collection was completed from August through October 2020. It's important to note that data points are only as accurate as the information provided by each agency and agencies may report figures differently. Data from Craig, CO was obtained from the most recent master plan (completed in 2018) with the exception of department total budget and capital budget which were retrieved from the City of Craig 2020 Annual Budget.

To ensure consistent comparison across cities, data from the 2018 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates were used. These figures may not be as precise as the decennial census (last conducted in 2010) or as up to date as local calculations, however, the American Community Survey was more recent than the 2010 census and standardized across the benchmarking locations. Land area figures were taken from the most current U.S. Census Quick Facts.

In the analysis below, the master planning team calculated the mean ("average") and the median ("middle") of the data. In instances where the collective data roughly followed a normal distribution, the average of the data points best represents the selected criterion. However, in the case of outliers—that is, when individual figures do not fit normally with the rest of the given data—the median provides a better snapshot, as it represents the midpoint of the sample. The City of La Junta was compared to each individual agency and also to the group overall based on these descriptive statistics.

Survey participants also returned qualitative data in the form of self-descriptions, which are also provided for analysis.

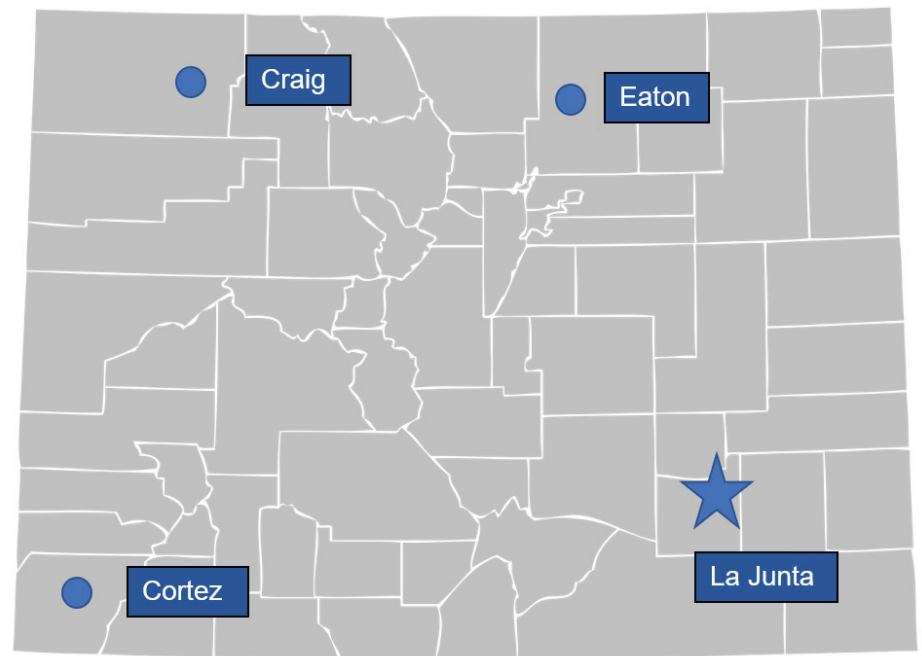


Figure 37: Tippy Martinez field

Peer Communities Characteristics

	Service Area Population	Land Area of City (in square miles)	Population per Square Mile	County	County Population	Median Income (dollars)	Median Age (years)
La Junta	6,881	3.0	2,345	Otero	18,432	\$30,830	39.7
Cortez	8,637	6.3	1,328	Montezuma	25,535	\$40,048	35.9
Craig	9,022	5.1	1,843	Moffat	13,283	\$50,455	37.8
Eaton	5,738	2.4	1,846	Weld	324,492	\$77,762	37.9
Benchmark Mean (Average)	7,799	4.6	1,119		121,103	\$56,088	37.2
Benchmark Median (Middle)	8,637	5.1	1,843		25,535	\$50,455	37.8

Table 13: Map of benchmarking communities in Colorado

The selected peer cities all reside in the state of Colorado, which has a total population of 5,758,736. All peer cities were very close to La Junta in population. The largest peer city, Craig, had a 2018 population estimate of 9,022, while the smallest community selected, Eaton, had 5,738 residents in 2018. The average population of the benchmark cities was 7,799, providing a good comparison for existing facilities and services in La Junta. Peer cities were located in counties with a much wider variety of populations. Moffat County (Craig) was the smallest at 13,283 residents. Moffat and Montezuma (25,535) were much more comparable in size to Otero County (18,432), the location of La Junta than Weld County, home of Eaton. Weld County contains the City of Greeley and several other large towns while Otero, Montezuma, and Moffat Counties are almost exclusively rural.

In terms of land area, La Junta spans 3.0 square miles, compared to the benchmark average of 4.6 (range: 2.36–6.10). Because of its smaller physical size, the population density of La Junta, 2,345 residents per square mile, was the highest of the peer group.

The median age in La Junta, 39.7 years, was above the benchmark average of 34.9 (range: 32.7–35.7). The median household income of La Junta (\$30,830) was the lowest of all benchmark communities. Eaton’s household income was significantly higher than the rest of the peer group, at \$77,762. Overall, the group’s average household income was \$56,088 with a range of \$40,048–\$77,762. The low household income may pose challenges for La Junta in comparison to peer cities in generating enough funding for facility improvements and additions as well as for expanding programming.

Agency Characteristics and Staffing

	Total Number of Parks	Total Acres Managed by Agency	Total Acres of Developed Parks	Total Acres of Open Space	Park Acres Per 1,000 Residents	Total Paved Trail Miles	Total Unpaved Trail Miles (Soft Surface)	Trail Miles Per 1,000 Residents
La Junta	10	41	55	0	8.0	0	0	0
Cortez	13	426	175	251	20.3	4.0	9	1.5
Craig	7	52	33	19	3.6	2.9	.5	.37
Eaton	1	35	20	10	3.5	0	.75	.13
Benchmark Mean (Average)	7	171	76	93	9.7	2.3	3.4	.73
Benchmark Median (Middle)	7	52	33	19	3.6	2.9	.75	.26

Table 14: Baseline Characteristics of Peer Agencies

Directly comparing information such as total number of parks or acres managed by an agency does not provide a full picture of how much parkland is available to residents, as it does not take into account the service area population (i.e., how many residents share use of that parkland). Measures such as residents per park and total park acres per 1,000 people therefore provide more useful figures for comparing agencies. La Junta compared favorably with the group, with 10 parks compared to an average of 7. The group averages were skewed somewhat by Eaton, which had only one park. In this case, comparisons to the median number of parks (7) and residents per park (1,289) offered additional insight, though La Junta still compared favorably. The average

park acreage per 1,000 residents covered a wide range among the peer group with Cortez offering significantly more park acreage (175) and park acreage per resident (20.3) than the rest of the peer group or La Junta, though, with 55 acres of developed park land and 8 acres of park land per resident, La Junta was well ahead of the other two members of the peer group.

Trails provide excellent opportunities for physical activity, recreation, social interactions, and connectivity. La Junta has made a concerted effort to build trails in recent years and led the peer group in both trail miles and trail miles per 1,000 residents. La Junta had 0 miles of trails compared to the group average of 5.7 miles and .73 miles per 1,000 residents for the group.

	Number of Full-Time Employees	Number of Part-Time Employees	Population Per Full-Time Employee	Volunteer Hours
La Junta	13	5	529	200
Cortez	15	65	576	540
Craig	8		1,128	Not Reported
Eaton	6	75	956	2,800
Benchmark Mean (Average)	9.7	70	550	1670
Benchmark Median (Middle)	8		956	

Table 15: Staffing Levels of Peer Agencies

In organizations of all shapes and sizes, variability exists in human resources. Peer agencies track staffing levels differently and do not necessarily provide a consistent benchmark. Even though agencies were asked to report part-time employees as full-time equivalents, or FTEs, and total number of part-time employees, not all the agencies were able to return these measurements. An example of calculating FTEs can be described as follows: a full-time work week is considered to be 40 hours, or 1 FTE. If a part-time staff works 30 hours per week, that would be 0.75 FTE or if two part-time staff each work 20 hours (0.5 FTE), their time can be added together to count as 1 FTE.

Not all benchmarking agencies were able to calculate population per full-time equivalent. Instead, a proxy of population per full-time employee was used. La Junta had a lower number of residents per full-time employee, 529, than any of the benchmark communities, which ranged from 576 to 1,128 residents per full-time employees.

Volunteer engagement can be viewed as a measure of the community’s support for parks and recreation in a community. Volunteer engagement for the peer group varied greatly. La Junta reported 200 volunteer hours per year, but the Department doesn’t fully track all volunteer hours. Eaton, the peer community closest to La Junta in population size, reported using 2,800 volunteer hours per year. Craig did not report volunteer hours. It is not clear if this is because they do not utilize volunteers or if they were unable to calculate volunteer hours for this report.

Agency Budgets and Funding

The following definitions were provided to peer agencies on the survey:

- Total Operating Budget: From ALL sources. Please use and indicate the most recently completed fiscal year
- Percent of Budget from Fees and Charges: All fees and charges: programs, rentals, contract fees
- Percent of Budget from Taxes: Commonly property and/or local option income tax
- Percent of Budget from All Other Sources: For Example: Food and beverage, operations or capital, unrestricted, etc.
- Average Capital Budget (last five years): An average of the annual capital budget from the last five years

One of the major benefits of surveying cities across the state of Colorado is seeing the variation in approaches to parks and recreation budgeting. During analysis, budget-related data was standardized to the greatest extent possible, but it is important to note that every municipality operates differently and reported their data according to their own bookkeeping standards. The peer agencies were also asked to report dedicated levies, other dedicated taxes, and sponsorships. However, some of the peer agencies were unable to report these figures or they were included in the budget’s “other sources” column.

	Total Operating Budget	Operating Budget Per Capita	Percent of Budget from Fees and Charges	Percent of Budget from Taxes	Percent of Budget from All Other Sources	Average Capital Budget (Total Last Five Years)
La Junta	\$1,007,000	\$146.35	12%	88%	0%	\$55,000
Cortez	\$2,857,992	\$330.90	36%	63%	1%	\$500,000
Craig	\$1,705,750	\$189.01				\$358,873
Eaton	\$4,335,298	\$755.54	35%	58%	7%	\$467,000
Benchmark Mean (Average)	\$1,072,897	\$380.35	35.3%	57.1%	4.6%	\$441,958
Benchmark Median (Middle)	\$2,857,992	\$330.90				\$467,000

Table 16: Review of Peer Agencies’ Budgets

Operating budgets vary significantly across communities. Additionally, one community, Craig was not able to provide a breakdown of revenue sources (i.e., percent of budget from taxes versus fees and charges) but did provide total budget and capital budget numbers. As a result, median values for revenue categories are not reflected and mean revenue values were calculated using two sources- Cortez and Eaton.

The budget data collected for this benchmarking comparison generally correlated to household income for each community, which is not surprising. La Junta’s total budget of \$1,007,000 and budget per capita of \$146.35 were the lowest of the peer group, reflective of the rank of La Junta’s income. Eaton topped the group with a budget of \$4,335,298, again reflective of the community’s income. Communities with a higher level of resources are able to provide more financial support for amenities such as parks and recreation facilities. La Junta does keep the tax burden low (\$128.78 per resident annually). It also makes a concerted effort to provide low cost or free recreation programming,

receiving only 12% of its annual revenue from fees and charges. Conversely, Eaton received a higher amount per resident from taxes (\$535.88) while taking in a much higher percentage of revenue from fees and charges (35%) than La Junta. Cortez’s revenue breakdown was very similar to Eaton with 36% from fees and 63% from taxes but with a tax burden (\$208.47) much more in line with La Junta’s. La Junta also had the lowest level of average annual capital expenditures, at \$55,000 per year compared to an average of \$441,958 annually for the peer group. Local desires for both an indoor community center and a pool in La Junta mean that the capital budget will need to increase significantly in order to fund the construction and maintenance of those facilities.

Agency Facilities

	Aquatic Facilities (Indoor)	Aquatic Facilities (Outdoor)	Aquatic Facilities Spray Pads	Total Number of Pools	Pools per 10,000
La Junta	0	1	0	2	2.8
Cortez	2	1	1	3	3.5
Craig	0	2	0	2	2.2
Eaton	1	0	0	1	1.7
Benchmark Mean	1	1	0.33	2	2.5
Benchmark Median	1	1	0	2	2.2

Table 17: Aquatic Facilities

Aquatic facilities in the peer communities varied: one indoor pool in Eaton, two outdoor pools in Craig, and two indoor pools, one outdoor pool, and one splash pad in Cortez. La Junta’s Wipeout Wave Pool facility with a lap pool, kid’s pool and waterslides was comparable to peer facilities.

	Recreation/Community Centers	Recreation/Community Centers (sq. ft.)	Square Feet of Rec. Centers per Capita	Recreation Centers per 20,000	Other Non-Maintenance Buildings (sq. ft.)
La Junta	0	0	0	0	0
Cortez	1	46,000	5.3	0.23	0
Craig	0	0	0	0	0
Eaton	1	63,000	11	0.35	0
Benchmark Mean (Average)	0.67	36,333	4.7	0.17	0
Benchmark Median (Middle)	1	46,000	5.3	0.23	0

Table 18: Buildings and Facilities

La Junta currently offers no indoor recreation facilities or community centers. This is not unusual for a community comprised of smaller communities. Many such communities rely on partners, such as schools or private facility owners, to serve this particular need but the presence of and the desire for these community-owned facilities is growing. Craig was the other community in the benchmark group without an indoor recreation or community center.

	Basketball Courts (indoor)	Basketball Courts (outdoor)	Basketball Courts per 10,000	Pickleball (indoor)	Pickleball (outdoor)	Tennis (outdoor lighted)	Tennis (outdoor unlighted)	Tennis Courts per 10,000	Volleyball (Indoor)	Volleyball (outdoor)	Diamond Fields (baseball/softball)	Ball Diamonds per 10,000	Disc Golf Courses	Rectangular Fields (football/soccer)
La Junta	0	7	10.2	0	0	6	1	10.2	0	1	5	7.2	1	0
Cortez	1	4	4.3	2	6	6	0	5.2	2	3	8	9.2	1	17
Craig	0	5	5.5	0	2	0	2	2.2	0	2	4	4.4	1	5
Eaton	2	0	3.4	3	0	0	0	0	2	0	4	6.9	0	1
Benchmark Mean (Average)	0.3	3	5.1	2	2.7	2	.67	3.4	1.3	1.7	3.7	5.1	0.67	7.7
Benchmark Median (Middle)	1	4	4.3	2	2	0	0	2.2	2	2	4	6.9	1	5

Table 19: Athletic and Recreation Facilities

Despite not having an indoor recreation center, La Junta compared very favorably with peer communities with respect to specific recreation facilities provided, though they are largely outdoors. La Junta offered more basketball courts (7), and tennis courts (7) than any other benchmarking peer and had twice the amount of these facilities per capita compared to any other peer. La Junta was well ahead of the group in ball diamonds per capita at 7.2 per 10,000 compared to an average of 5.1 per 10,000. Of the peer group, only Eaton did not offer a disc golf course. La Junta did not have any pickleball courts or department-managed soccer or football fields, which all other peer communities offered, and the city had only one volleyball court. La Junta depends on school-owned fields for soccer and football. The peer average for pickleball courts was 2.7, rectangle fields was 7.7, and volleyball courts was 3.7

	Community Gardens (plots)	Park Shelters	Playgrounds	Playgrounds per 10,000	Outdoor Fitness Stations	Permanent Stage/ Amphitheater	Mobile Stage	Other
La Junta	0	8	3	4.4	0	0	0	Senior center
Cortez	18	12	5	4.3	0	3	0	18-hole golf course
Craig	0	6	7	7.7	0	0	0	
Eaton	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	Community event room
Benchmark Mean (Average)	6	6	4.3	4	0	1	0	
Benchmark Median (Middle)	0	6	5	4.3	0	0	0	

Table 20: Other facilities

La Junta had more park shelters and playgrounds than the majority of the peer group with 8 park shelters and 3 playgrounds (4.4 per 10,000 population). Only Cortez had more park shelters (12) and only Craig had more playgrounds (4.3 for every 10,000 people). La Junta had the only senior center in the peer group, while Cortez owned the only 18-hole golf course, community gardens, and stages or amphitheaters among the group. The peer group members did not have any outdoor fitness stations or a mobile stage.

Programming

	Summer Camps	Specific Senior Programs	Specific Teen Programs	Programs for People with Disabilities	After-School Programs	Preschool	Before-School Programs	Full Daycare
La Junta	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Cortez	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No
Craig	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No
Eaton	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No

Table 21: Programming for Children, Seniors, People with Disabilities

Program offerings for children, seniors, and people with disabilities can be a measure of a commitment to serving more vulnerable populations within a community’s available resources. La Junta’s relatively small budget and revenue levels impacted its set of program offerings. La Junta was the only one of the peer group not to offer summer camps or teen programs and one of two not to offer after-school programs. No members of the peer group offered preschool, before school, or full daycare programs. All of the agencies offered senior specific programming. A success for La Junta was that it was the only peer to offer programs for people with disabilities.

	Summer Camps	Specific Senior Programs	Specific Teen Programs	Programs for People with Disabilities	After-School Programs	Preschool	Before-School Programs	Full Daycare
La Junta	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Cortez	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No
Craig	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No
Eaton	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No

Table 22: Program Offerings: Sports and Fitness

La Junta offered a complete set of sports and fitness programming with both team and individual sports, racquet sports, golf, and fitness classes. The only category lacking from this portfolio was martial arts. Cortez was the only benchmarking peer to offer all of the surveyed programs. Neither Craig nor Eaton offered martial arts, racquet sports, or golf.

	Health and Wellness Education	Themed Special Events	Social Recreation Events	Safety Training	Trips and Tours	Performing Arts	Visual Arts	Cultural Crafts	Natural and Cultural History Activities
La Junta	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Cortez	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Craig	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Eaton	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No

Table 23: Program Offerings: Arts, Crafts, Nature, Leisure, and Cultural

La Junta’s arts, crafts, nature, leisure, and cultural recreational programming offerings were comparable to the peer group with health and wellness education, themed events, social recreation events, and safety training. No members of the peer group offered performing or visual arts and only Craig offered natural and cultural history activities. All offered themed special events. Other programming options, including health and wellness education, social recreation events, safety training, and cultural crafts, were mixed—some of the cities offered them, and some did not.

Benchmarking Summary

La Junta compared favorably with the peer group in terms of facilities. La Junta offered at or above the average number of facilities, with the exception of a community center. Given the comparatively small budget for parks and recreation and the relatively high degree of satisfaction, La Junta Parks and Recreation appears to manage resources well and provides much of what the community needs for recreation. The addition of indoor recreation would place the La Junta Parks and Recreation Department in an excellent position to help fulfill community goals of improving health, economic activity, and overall quality of life.



TRENDS ANALYSIS

There are thousands of park and recreation agencies in the United States making decisions pertaining to their parks, greenways, trails, facilities, and programs. Analyzing trends from park and recreation agencies nationwide can provide guidance and information on the services and facilities that park and recreation agencies are offering and innovative ideas they are implementing. By considering these trends, La Junta Parks and Recreation will be able to make well-informed decisions to better serve its users and create successful parks based on previous experiences and other agencies' successes.

National Trends

Parks and Greenways

Most park and recreation agencies in the U.S. have jurisdiction over about 19 parks, comprising an average of 432.5 acres (NRPA, 2019). Most parks and recreation agencies take on responsibilities for parks and greenways within their management area. About 78% of park agencies manage trails, 71% manage special-purpose parks and open spaces, and 40% administer community gardens (NRPA, 2019). Because the City of La Junta had a population of 6,998 in 2018 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018), this report will include data from cities of a similar size.

In the average agency serving less than 20,000 residents, there is one park for every 1,231 residents, and 10.1 acres of parkland for every 1,000 residents (NRPA, 2019). In La Junta, this would mean that the city should have 5 or 6 parks consisting of around 81 acres of parkland. The typical park agency with trails manages or maintains about 11 miles on average (NRPA, 2019).

The COVID-19 has thrust the importance of parks to the forefront of community development conversations. Parks across the country have seen record usership as Americans have flocked to parks as safer, alternative recreation options when looking for activities that allow for physical distancing. According to the Trust for Public Land (2020), more than ever, Americans are seeking experiences with nature while still staying close to home.

Technology

Technology is impacting parks and greenways. Monitoring systems, such as beacon counters and geo-fencing, are becoming more prevalent for tracking use in parks. Biometric identification systems will likely become more popular in the near future for identification and authorizing access (NRPA, 2019). Recreational and commercial drones are increasingly utilized in park settings.

Many parks have suggested there are some benefits and applications of drone use, including assisting in public safety missions such as search and rescue, monitoring wildfires, identifying and mapping rare plant species, and monitoring cultural and archeological sites (NRPA, 2019).

Park Facilities

The facilities in a park are vital to park visitors. Across the U.S., 94% of parks agencies have playgrounds in their portfolio of outdoor assets (NRPA, 2019). As far as sports facilities go, 86% of parks have basketball courts, 80% have outdoor tennis courts, 78% have baseball diamonds for youth, and 66% have multi-purpose rectangular fields (NRPA, 2019). While there are additional varieties of sports facilities in parks, these are the most common. More than half of parks agencies nationwide have community centers (58%) or recreation centers (57%). About a quarter of nationwide parks have nature centers (27%) and about a third have amphitheaters (33%) (NRPA, 2019). Additionally, about 40% of parks nationwide have senior centers. As the percentage of the population that is 65 years and older, pickleball has become a popular activity across the country. Designating a pickleball court may be of interest to La Junta, due to the city's aging population. Another park facility type that has seen an increase in popularity in recent years is water features (The Trust for Public Land, 2018). As summer heat increases every year, water features such as splash pads and spray grounds are growing in implementation and popularity and are suggested as a replacement for wading pools or children's pools.

Most park facilities in the US have experienced an increase in the use of parks and recreation facilities since 2015. This increase has been caused by factors including by economic expansion, the 100th anniversary of the National Park Service in 2016, social media, and mobile technology (National Parks Visitation, 2019). In 2020 alone, 55.3% of parks expect an increase in facility usage, while only 2.9% of parks expect a decrease (Tipping, 2019). Many parks and recreation facilities are getting older and possibly outdated. However, the number of park agencies planning new construction within the next several years has been climbing: in 2019, 32.2% of agencies planned new construction to begin in the following year (Tipping, 2019). On average, park agencies plan to spend around five million dollars on their construction efforts (Tipping, 2019). By updating facilities, parks agencies can ensure that they are prepared to handle expected future visitor increases.

Programming

Programming is an important function of park and recreation agencies. Agencies serving a population less than 20,000 typically hold an average of 35 fee-based programs per year. The 10 most commonly offered programs include holiday events, group exercise programs, fitness programs, youth sports, educational programs, day and summer camps, yoga and tai-chi, adult sports, arts and crafts, and swimming programs. Due to a recent increase in interest in environmental education, 21.8% of facilities are planning to add environmental education programming (Tipping, 2019). Recent trends have also shown park and recreation facilities are being used for initiatives relating to wellness, inclusion for people with physical and mental disabilities, outreach to economically-disadvantaged and underserved populations, resource conservation and green issues, hunger and nutrition, and disaster recovery assistance (Tipping, 2019). By responding to public interest in certain programs and initiatives, agencies are able to educate the public as well as garner interest in their causes and programs. Of park agencies serving a population of less than 20,000, only about a third (31%) offer programming designed specifically for people with disabilities (NPRA, 2019). Because this is a special interest in many communities, it is a gap that many parks are aiming to address in the future. Out-of-school-time programs are also common, specifically in agencies serving less than 20,000 residents (NRPA, 2019).

Finding ways to pay for programs is generally one of the top concerns for park agencies, along with marketing, staffing, and maintenance. However, park agencies across the country have seen revenues from user fees increase every year since 2013 (Tipping, 2019). Nevertheless, long-term trends have highlighted declining general fund support and increasing demand for self-generated revenue to cover operating and maintenance costs following a rise in public-private partnerships to fund new parks and park facilities (NPRA, 2019).

It is important to note that not all programming is executed by the park agency

alone. A majority (87.9%) of recreation, sports, and fitness facilities partner with other organizations in order to expand programming capabilities and provide more opportunities for their participants (Tipping, 2019). More than 60% of these partnerships are with local schools, while 33% are with corporations or local businesses (Tipping, 2019).

Summary

By comparing trends in parks and recreation services across the United States, this report summarizes some of the successes in the field, as well as areas that need to be addressed. Using similar agencies as a guideline allows new or emerging parks agencies to learn what is popular and what facilities or programs to employ. By compiling the successes of other agencies, it is also possible to show the improvement of agencies and how other agencies can improve in similar ways to have more success.

For the City of La Junta, the data presented in this report implies that an increase in parks and recreation users and visitors can be anticipated. The increasing desire to experience nature closer to home should be taken into account as La Junta continues to develop new park space and community trails. As local populations shift, the city may need to shift its recreation program in order to accommodate new user preferences and needs. In providing desired services and programming, the City has an opportunity to consider forming partnerships with other entities in the community in order to best meet the needs of residents. Partnerships may assist in a more agile response to changing environmental and demographic needs as significant shifts due to climate change and technological advances continue to occur.

NEEDS ANALYSIS

An essential component of parks master planning is a needs assessment. The needs assessment brings together the discrete data gathered through earlier stages of the planning process to identify a path forward for the agency. The needs assessment is valuable because it allows planners to consider the unique situation of the City of La Junta and its residents and tailor the plan to best fit their needs. This needs assessment will use two methods to identify recommendations: (1) level of service (LOS) standards and (2) issues analysis.

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) and the American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration developed a formula for assessing the level of service that a park and recreation agency provides based on a ratio of acreage to population.¹ This metric helps an agency determine if more park land is needed given estimates of the community’s future. Level of service also includes service area and residents’ access to park lands based on distance. The Trust for Public Land’s ParkScore suggests a standard of a 10-minute or less walk (or a ½ mile) as the ideal distance to a park.² In addition, level of service can be applied to the facilities that a park and recreation agency provides. The ParkScore includes metrics and standards for the number of facilities in relation to the population. This section will use these factors to assess the level of service that the Department is providing.

While analyzing level of service is valuable for providing an overview of the numeric situation of a park system, it cannot adequately capture the perceptions and desires of community leaders and residents or prominent trends in the parks and recreation industry. For this reason, this needs assessment will also include an issues analysis which identifies needs and problems and discusses options for their resolution. The issues analysis will be used to ensure that key stakeholders’ and the public’s opinions as well as policy and social trends are accounted for. Together, these two components will help identify potential gaps in the system and inform recommendations to ensure a bright and sustainable future for the City of La Junta Parks and Recreation Department.

Parks and Trails

The City of La Junta Parks and Recreation Department provides ten parks which cover approximately 41 acres of land. The current level of service for park land being provided by the Department is 8 acres per 1,000 residents (Table 24). The population of the City of La Junta decreased between the years 2010-2015, and have since risen so that the average percent change in population is currently estimated at -2.78%. If the increase continues then the level of service may decrease in five years.

Level of Service for Parks and Trails				
Unit of Analysis	Acreage	Current LOS	5-year LOS	Recommended LOS
Parks	41	8.0	7.8	Increase
Unit of Analysis	Mileage	Current LOS ¹	5-year LOS ²	Recommended LOS
Trails	0	0	0	Increase

Table 24: LOS for Parks and Trails

The LOS is per 1,000 residents and based on the most recent population estimate. The 5-year LOS is per 1,000 residents and is calculated through the average percent change in population from the 2010 U.S. Census. According to the NRPA (2020), the national median for park agencies across the country is 9.9 acres of parkland per 1,000. That being the case, it is recommended for La Junta to increase their park portfolio.

While the mapping analysis indicated that most La Junta residents live within a 10-minute walk to a general-purpose park, a frequent reason indicated in the

community survey as to why respondents didn’t visit particular parks was due to proximity to their residence. This does not mean that residents live too far away from all parks so much as they are often choosing to utilize the parks closest to their homes. It should be noted the geospatial analysis indicates over 98% of La Junta residents live within a 10-minute walk to a park, which is much higher than the national average of 55% of residents within a 10-minute walk of a park (TTPL, 2018).

Key stakeholders indicated an overall satisfaction with the existing park system.

¹ Mertes, James D. and James R. Hall. *Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines*. Ashburn: National Recreation and Park Association, 1995.

² The Trust for Public Land. “ParkScore 2017: Methodology.” Accessed February 24, 2018. <http://parkscore.tpl.org/methodology.php#sm.00007tsr2f6z0d9hrh926z6bx2k90>.

There was divide between the stakeholders interviewed whether Department focus should be on maintaining existing infrastructure or expand the park system. A number of community members voiced a desire for a dog park. Respondents to the community survey, however, generally favored maintaining existing parks and recreational infrastructure.

According to NRPA (2020), the average park and recreation department has 11 miles of trails within its network. This indicates that La Junta, which currently does not have a trail system, is below the national average in trail mileage available to residents. Approximately one-third of stakeholders interviewed were enthusiastic about developing the trail system in La Junta and the community survey participants were very divided on the importance of constructing new trails.

Trails have a variety of benefits including economic and health benefits for communities and residents. One study found that every dollar invested in trail construction and use resulted in a reduction of individual medical costs by approximately \$2.94 (Wang et al., 2005). Another found that paved trails, unpaved

trails, and wooded areas significantly predicted the likelihood of people engaging in physical activity (Kaczynski et al., 2008). A study investigating two counties included in the Virginia Creeper Rail Trail found that tourists spent \$1.2 million in the two-county area (Bowker et al., 2007). Although the amount of money spent varies by the size of the county and existing economy, Moore, Gitelson, and Graefe (1994) found that on a rural trail, visitor expenditures had a higher impact than trails in other areas. Since trails are important to the health of La Junta residents and could have positive impacts on the economy, community, this plan recommends increasing the miles of trails offered.

Recreation Facilities

The City of La Junta has a variety of recreational facilities throughout the park system. These include pavilions, picnic shelters, restrooms, picnic tables and benches, playground and play areas, ball diamonds, basketball courts, tennis courts, volleyball nets, horseshoe pits, one pool with two diving boards, one splash pool, one waterslide, a 9-hole golf course, a disc golf course, and a skate park.

Facility Type	Qty	LOS ¹	TTPL Median LOS ²	NRPA Median Qty ³	Recommendation
Ball Diamonds	5	7.27	1.6	5.5	Decrease
Rectangle Fields	0	--	2.4	5.4	Increase
Basketball Courts	7	10.17	--	1.68	Decrease
Playgrounds	3	4.36	2.6	2.73	No Change
Volleyball Courts	1	14.54	4.2	-	No Change
Disc Golf Course	1	14.53	0.4	-	No Change
Golf Course	1	14.53	0.7	-	No Change
Skate Park	1	14.53	0.6	0.68	No Change
Splash Pad	0	--	1.3	-	No Change
Amphitheater	0	--	-	0.64	No Change
Community Center	1	2.91	-	0.72	No Change
Recreation Center	0	--	0.7	0.77	No Change
Pickleball Courts	0	--	0.6	-	Increase
Tennis Courts	7	10.17	1.7	2.35	Decrease
Dog Park	0	--	1.2	0.69	1 new dog park
Community Garden	0	--	0.3	0.87	No Change
Swimming Pools	2	29.07	1.8	0.86	No Change

Table 25: LOS for Facilities

¹ LOS is per 10,000 residents for ball diamonds, rectangle fields, basketball hoops/courts, playgrounds, and tennis courts; per 20,000 residents for amphitheatres, community centers, recreation centers, and pickleball courts; and per 100,000 residents for volleyball courts, disc golf course, golf course, skate park, splash pad, dog park, swimming pools, and nature centers based on the Trust for Public Land’s 2020 City Park Facts Data and the 2018 population estimate of 6,881 from the U.S. Census Bureau.

² TTPL Median LOS is based on the median level of service from 100 cities provided in The Trust for Public Land’s 2020 City Park Facts Data.

³ NRPA standard calculated through the median number of residents per facility in the NRPA 2020 Agency Performance Review.

La Junta facilities offer a level of service above both the TTPL level of service averages and the NRPA quantity averages in all categories in which they have the listed facility. As the Department does not provide a recreation center, pickleball courts, dog park, community garden, or nature center, it falls below national averages in these facilities. Of the recreation facilities the Department currently does not provide, it is recommended to increase service coverage for pickleball courts and a dog park.

Key stakeholders were mostly satisfied with the existing number of facilities but wanted to see updates or renovations of existing equipment. In both key stakeholder interviews and the community survey, respondents indicated the need for a designated soccer field and potentially less baseball fields. Considering that soccer is the Department’s youth program with by far the highest number of participants and that baseball and softball fields are often most used by the schools and junior college, it would be logical to reallocate resources to support the more popular programming. Fixing the tennis courts in City Park was frequently referenced. There was considerable discussion pertaining to completing bathroom renovations and adding bathrooms to parks. The public also mentioned updating and repairing playgrounds. While they felt maintaining existing facilities was important, they had some recommendations for new facilities. These included a recreation center, dog park, pickleball courts, and accessible restrooms.

While a recreation center is unmet in industry averages and was suggested by key stakeholders, it did not arise as a priority from the community survey. Given the expense of the facility it is not recommended. Pickleball courts were listed as an unmet need and the tennis courts were frequently mentioned as an area of dissatisfaction for residents in the survey and came up in key stakeholder interviews. Since these two courts can overlap and the installation of one would help meet industry averages, pickleball suggested as a new facility to meet community needs. A way to meet this need is to have dual use of the tennis courts at City Park, once they are repaired. The repaired courts could be used for both tennis and pickleball. Off-leash dog parks also arose as a priority area with key stakeholders and is an amenity that La Junta does not yet offer. The ease of the development of a dog park given the amount of undeveloped space that La Junta has makes this an easy opportunity for the City. The inclusion of one dog park to the system is recommended.

An examination of wayfinding and signage and information provision online should be considered in terms of comprehensiveness and access. In addition, study of the use of specific facilities across the system could be valuable for identifying unused facilities for the next plan. Facilities found to be underutilized by Department could be recommended for removal or transfer of ownership to the public school or Otero Junior College. The removal or change to facilities could alleviate some of the concerns for maintenance and improvement.

There are significant accessibility barriers for a number of recreational facilities in the City’s system, most notably the disc golf course, which is very rustic and would pose a significant challenge for individuals who require mobility assistance.

The accessibility assessment also identified some improvements to facilities which are of immediate concern or easy in nature to resolve. Suggestions included designating accessible parking, accessible routes from parking lots to park facilities, playground surfacing and elevation, shelter routes and surfacing elevation, trail surfacing and slope, accessible information and signage, restroom accessibility at all parks and recreation facilities, renovating the golf club house to meet accessibility standards, relocation of benches to firm and stable routes, repairs to playground surfacing, removal of overgrowth at the Prairie View Park, among other changes.

Recreation Programming

The Department offers youth programming for kindergarten through 6th grade. Programming for seniors and people with disabilities is also offered. No programming is offered for teens or adults. Team sports are primarily offered for the youth programs as well as aquatics. Fitness classes, individual sports, golf, and racquet sports are also part of the Department’s programming portfolio. Other programming options include health and wellness education, social recreation events, and safety trainings are regularly provided by the Department.

There is a significant service gap for teens and adults in the programming offered by the Department. The need was apparent through both stakeholder interviews and the community survey responses. Many community members expressed a desire for adult sports leagues that could potentially be sponsored by local businesses to help offset the Department’s resources.

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

Based on the research, community in-put, and assessments, the parks and recreation system in La Junta is well supported, appreciated, and utilized by the community. There are also opportunities to strengthen the system to better meet the needs of the community. In this section, the findings are translated into a five-year strategic action plan.

Criticality and Timeframe

The action plan is arranged into three main categories: parks, recreational facilities and programming, and trails. Each recommended strategic action is rated proportionately with its criticality, or the extent to which it inhibits community access, is potentially not up to code, may impact safety, or has a significant impact on other elements of system access and functioning. This plan presents four levels of criticality: critical, serious, minor, and easy, which are defined as follows:

- **Critical:** A critical priority is given to those physical or programmatic deficiencies that impact a significantly high number of people from utilizing a facility or accessing a program.
- **Serious:** A serious priority is given to those physical or programmatic deficiencies that substantially inhibit individuals from utilizing a facility or accessing a program.
- **Minor:** A minor priority is given to those deficiencies that only slightly inhibit individuals from utilizing a facility or accessing a program.
- **Easy:** Action items determined to be easy can be addressed quickly, in-house, and with limited resources.

An implementation timeframe is provided for each solution. These timeframes are intended to help the Department transition from the planning process to implementing its action plan, recognizing that funding, staff, and other factors will likely impact the proposed timeframes. As such, the Department should review the strategic action plan and update timeframes and action items on an annual basis. The timeframes are as follows:

- **Immediate:** less than 1 year
- **Short-term:** 1-2 years
- **Mid-term:** 3-7 years
- **Long-term:** more than 7 years

Strategic Action Items

	Action Item	Criticality	Timeframe
All Parks, Recreation Facilities, and Programs	Develop formalized, documented service agreements with La Junta public schools and Otero Junior College for all recreational facilities and amenities	Critical	Immediate
	Add designated accessible parking at all parks and recreation facilities where dedicated parking exists	Critical	Short-term
	Diversify programming offered to the community	Critical	Short-/Mid-term
	Phased approach to correcting accessibility non-compliance issues in all parks and facilities	Critical	Mid-term
	Conduct thorough accessibility audits of each park and recreation facility.	Serious	Short-term
	Established one or multiple designated soccer fields	Serious	Short-term
	Reevaluate number of baseball/softball fields in the Department’s portfolio	Serious	Short-term
	Replace picnic tables and benches as needed and replace with ADA compliant picnic tables and benches	Serious	Mid-term
	Determine where drought tolerant landscaping and/or zero-scaping can be implemented to conserve resources	Serious	Mid-term
	Complete redevelopment of Livewell Park	Serious	Mid-term
	Complete construction of Brick and Tiles Park	Serious	Mid-term
Develop community dog park	Minor	Mid-term	

Table 26: Action items for all parks, recreation facilities, and programming

Most recreational facilities owned by the City are primarily utilized by La Junta public schools’ athletics and Otero Junior College. That being the case, there are no formal agreements pertaining to facility use and maintenance responsibility between the three entities. Developing formal, written use agreements would clarify terms of use among partners for the shared facilities. User agreements should be reviewed every 3-5 years to allow for amendments and updates.

Currently, no parks in the City’s system have designated accessible parking spaces. Proper striping and signage to provide a compliant ratio of accessible parking is a straightforward initial step toward ensuring accessibility compliance for all City parks and recreation facilities. An example would be for the City to chip and seal the parking lot at College Overlook Park and in the process appropriately designate accessible parking.

Most recreational facilities operated by the City could use accessibility improvements, ranging from adding designated accessible parking to installing transfer stations. Prominent among these is the need to fix accessibility non-compliance instances at the Rodeo Grounds, such as the bleachers. Community fundraising is currently underway to address the issues with the bleachers at the Rodeo Grounds. Another example is to pave the parking lot at 22nd Street stadium and designate accessible parking.

The picnic tables and benches in City parks have are approximately 20 years old and some are showing significant wear and tear. These should be replaced to ensure safety for users and each new picnic table and bench needs to be compliant with accessibility standards. While these are simple fixes, a detailed accessibility audit will help provide the City with a phased approach to increasing accessibility and providing system users with the best possible total experience in parks and recreation facilities.

The semi-arid environment where La Junta is located has the potential to increasingly put strain on City landscaping and irrigation resources. Investigating native, drought-resistant landscaping or zero-scaping in place of traditional landscaping floral species. Examples of where this would provide the opportunity to reallocate Department funding and staff time include the cemetery, golf course, Anderson Trail, Prairie View Park, and the disc golf course, among others.

Throughout the entire planning process, it was evident that a service gap exists in the recreational programming provided by the Department. The Department can seize this opportunity to better meet the recreational needs of the entire community, regardless of age. Additionally, the prediction that the COVID-19 pandemic will continue into 2021 and potentially beyond necessitates reimagining what recreational programming consists of and looks like for communities. Per CDC and other public health recommendations, outdoor activities as less risky than indoor activities when interacting with others. This may provide an opportunity to expand the current use of outdoor spaces: outdoor yoga, tai chi, or other individually centered recreational activities could take place in parks and be added to the Department’s repertoire of programming and also engage the teen and adult community. This public health crisis requires us to innovate in our approaches to recreation, socialization, and community. It provides an incredible for the City to meet the needs of the community in new, pioneering ways.



Over the course of the designated timeline for this system master plan, the City can continue to make repairs and upgrades to park infrastructure, rotating resources to the different parks across the city. Some of these efforts will include replacing amenities and infrastructure that has exceeded its intended lifespan, as well as continuing tangible actions to increase accessibility throughout all parks.

City Park	Action Item	Criticality	Timeframe
	Complete restroom rehabilitation	Critical	Immediate
	Complete gravel paths	Easy	Short-term
	Update playground equipment	Serious	Mid-term
	Rehab and repurpose historic caretaker house	Minor	Mid-term
Repair tennis courts and include dual use as pickleball court(s)	Critical	Short-term	

Table 27: Action items for City Park

The tennis courts at City Park are currently unusable due to their condition of disrepair. Compared to the NRPA’s national standards for communities with populations under 20,000, La Junta exceeds the normal level of service for tennis courts. Having an unusable space in the City’s most popular park is an issue that ought to be addressed; the Department should repair the tennis courts or repurpose them for another use. The park and recreation system currently does not contain designated pickleball courts. When the tennis courts at City Park are repaired, they can serve a dual use of both tennis and pickleball, since the two sports are very similar in nature, activity, and spatial needs.

College Overlook Park	Action Item	Criticality	Timeframe
	Chip and seal parking lot and add accessible parking	Critical	Immediate
	Replace and upgrade play equipment	Serious	Mid-term
	Repair, replace, or repurpose basketball courts	Serious	Mid-term
Add accessible gazebo	Minor	Mid-term	

Table 28: Action items for College Overlook Park

The basketball courts at College Overlook Park are currently in poor condition. Compared to the NRPA’s national standards for communities with populations under 20,000, La Junta exceeds the normal level of service for basketball courts. The Department should repair the basketball courts or repurpose them for another use.

Red Crane Park	Action Item	Criticality	Timeframe
	Remove teeter totter	Critical	Short-term
	Repair fences	Serious	Mid-term
	Replace swing set	Serious	Mid-term

Table 29: Action items for Red Crane Park

Some items ought to be addressed sooner rather than later due to safety and code compliance. An example of this is the removal of the teeter totter at Red Crane Park. The safety of users and code compliance should always be prioritized.

Cemetery	Action Item	Criticality	Timeframe
	Install general wayfinding signs and sign in Calvary	Easy	Immediate
	Transition landscaping to drought tolerant or zero-scape	Serious	Mid-term
	Replace irrigation system	Serious	Short-term
Pavement improvements	Serious	Mid-term	

Table 30: Action items for the municipal cemetery

The experience in the municipal cemetery would be improved for visitors if signage were provided throughout the cemetery, including providing a sign to delineate between Fairview and Calgary.

22nd Street	Action Item	Criticality	Timeframe
	Pave parking lot and designate accessible spaces	Critical	Short-term

Table 31: Recreation facility and programming action items for 22nd Street

Edison Park	Action Item	Criticality	Timeframe
	Level turf	Minor	Mid-/Long-term
	Add signage	Minor	Short-term

Table 32: Recreation facility and programming action items for Edison Park

Disc Golf Course	Action Item	Criticality	Timeframe
	Further develop disc golf course to increase accessibility and utilization	Critical	Mid-term

Table 33: Recreation facility and programming action items for the disc golf course



Swimming Pool	Action Item	Criticality	Timeframe
	Replace diving board	Serious	Short-term
	Replace deck drains	Serious	Short-term

Table 34: Facility and programming action items for the community swimming pool

Potter Park	Action Item	Criticality	Timeframe
	Add accessible gazebo	Minor	Mid-term
	Maintain stadium bleachers as needed	Serious	Mid-term
	Connect pedestrian route to other trails	Minor	Mid-term

Table 35: Facility and programming action items for Potter Park

Rodeo Grounds	Action Item	Criticality	Timeframe
	Fix accessibility non-compliance with bleachers	Critical	Short-term
	Add shade shelter over bleachers	Minor	Mid-/Long-term
	Finish back stock pens	Minor	Short-term
	Update boxes and load-in for shoots	Minor	Mid-term
	Add more pens	Minor	Mid-term
	Refence pasture	Minor	Mid-term
	Improve roping area	Minor	Mid-term

Table 36: Facility and programming action items for the Rodeo Grounds

Trails

Trails	Action Item	Criticality	Timeframe
	Install wayfinding signage that identifies designated walking routes	Easy	Immediate
	Stripe designated walking routes so that the community is aware of the routes and able to use them	Easy	Immediate
	Add designated bicycle lanes where appropriate along pedestrian routes	Minor	Short-term
	Complete development of Anderson Trail, including paving, proper signage, lighting, striping, and connections to other established pedestrian thoroughfares	Serious	Mid-term
	Build on new and improved trail infrastructure to develop culture of non-motorized, pedestrian community activities	Minor	Mid-term

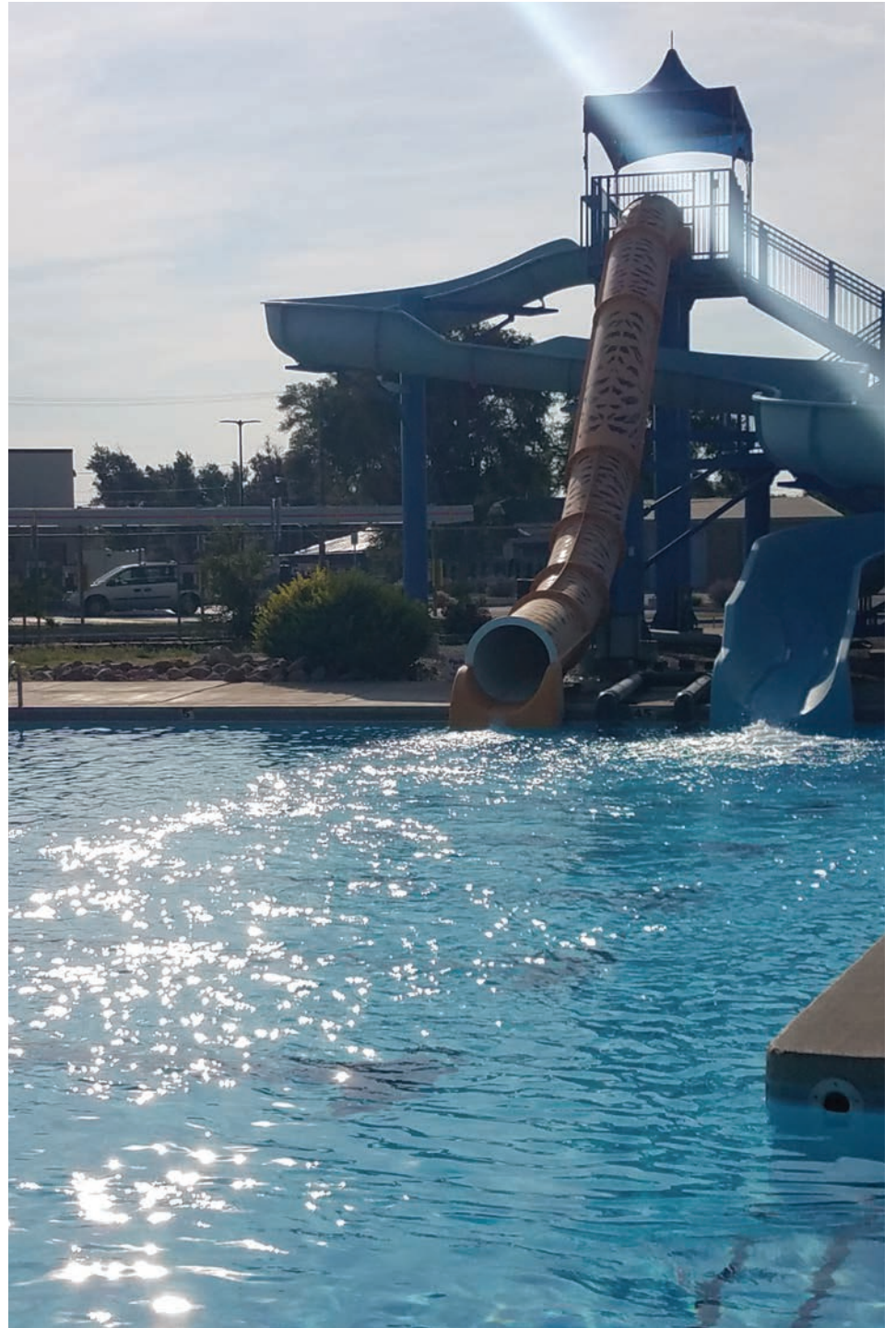
Table 41: Action items for trails

The Department is interested in promoting a mobile pedestrian culture. Providing appropriate signage and striping along designated routes across the community would help encourage public use. The completion of the Anderson Trail will help propel walking, biking, running, competitions, and other community recreation opportunities.

CONCLUSION

Parks and Recreation System Master Plans gather information from the community about existing conditions, identify gaps, and compile visions for a better future. The City of La Junta has a strong and robust parks and recreation system. It's quality of service is rival to or exceeds that of peer communities and is appreciated by the community. The reflective nature of the planning process has given the community an opportunity to express the strengths and needs of the existing parks and recreation system. In turn, the plan provides the City a chance to build upon this assessment to better meets the needs of the community.

The upheaval of our standards and norms at the time of the development of this plan has reminded communities that plans are best intentions that need to be agile and adaptable to the unexpected. This parks and recreation system master plan lays the foundation for future action to respond to community needs and desires and to continue to provide an excellent quality of life La Junta citizens.



REFERENCES

- Bowker, J. M., Bergstrom, J. C., & Gill, J. (2007). Estimating the economic value and impacts of recreational trails: A case study of the Virginia Creeper Rail Trail. *Tourism Economics*, 13(2), 241–260. Retrieved from http://www.parks.ca.gov/pages/1324/files/bowker_vct_jrnl.pdf
- City of La Junta. (2020). *Who we are*. Retrieved from <https://lajuntacolorado.org/>
- City of La Junta. (2017). *La Junta Comprehensive Plan*. City of La Junta, CO.
- Colorado Department of Transportation (2018). *Threatened, endangered, candidate, and proposed species by county*. Retrieved from <https://www.codot.gov/programs/environmental/wildlife/guidelines/colorado-federal-county-list-june-2018>
- Colorado Parks & Wildlife (2020). *John Martin Reservoir*. <https://cpw.state.co.us/placestogo/parks/JohnMartinReservoir>
- Colorado Parks & Wildlife (2019). *Park activities*. <https://cpw.state.co.us/placestogo/parks/JohnMartinReservoir/Pages/Activities.aspx>
- County Health Rankings. (2020). *County health rankings and roadmaps*. Retrieved from <https://countyhealthrankings.org>
- Goad, M. (2018). *Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site* [Photograph]. Flickr. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/exit78/44737243771>
- Kaczynski, A. T., Potwarka, L. R., & Saelens, B. E. (2008). Association of park size, distance, and features with physical activity in neighborhood parks. *American Journal of Public Health* 98(8), 1451-1456. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2007.129064>.
- Mertes, J. D., & Hall, J. R. (1995). *Park, recreation, open space and greenway guidelines*. National Recreation and Park Association.
- Moore, R. L., Gitelson, R. J., & Graefe, A. R. (1994). The economic impact of rail-trails. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 12(2), 63–72.
- Myers, H. (2010). *A history of the Santa Fe Trail*. (J. VanCoevern, Ed.). Retrieved from <https://www.santafetrail.org/the-trail/history/history-of-the-sft/>
- National Parks Visitation. (2019). Retrieved from <https://www.doi.gov/ocl/national-parks-visitation>.
- National Recreation and Park Association. 2019 NRPA Agency Performance Review: Park and recreation Agency Performance Benchmarks.
- National Park and Recreation Association. (2020). *2020 NRPA agency performance review*. <https://www.nrpa.org/publications-research/research-papers/agency-performance-review/>
- Nowak, D. Heisler, G. (2010). Improving air quality with trees and parks. *National Recreation and Parks Association Research Series Monograph*. 44p.
- Otero Junior College. (2020). *La Junta's exciting history*. Retrieved from https://www.ojc.edu/about/campus/community/lajunta_history.aspx
- Tipping, Emily. (2019). 2019 State of the Managed Recreation Industry. *A Look at What's Happening in Recreation, Sports and Fitness Facilities*.
- The Trust for Public Land. (2018). *2018 City Park Facts*. www.tpl.org/cityparkfacts.
- The Trust for Public Land. (2020). *2020 City park facts*. <https://www.tpl.org/2020-city-park-facts>
- U.S. Census Bureau (2017). Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/guidance/comparing-acs-data/2017.html>.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2018a). *Annual estimates of the resident population: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2018*. Retrieved from https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=PEP_2018_PEPANNRES&src=pt
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2018b) *American Community Survey 2018: 5-year estimates: La Junta City, Colorado*. Retrieved from <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/profile?q=La%20Junta%20city,%20Colorado&g=1600000US0842110>

- U.S. Census Bureau. (2018c) *Census of Population and Housing*. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/prod/www/decennial.html>
- U.S. Climate Data. (2020). *Climate La Junta- Colorado*. Retrieved from <https://www.usclimatedata.com/climate/la-junta/colorado/united-states/usco0223>
- U.S. Forest Service. (2020a). *Recreation*. Retrieved from <https://www.fs.usda.gov/recmain/psicc/recreation>
- U.S. Forest Service. (2020b). *Picket Wire Canyonlands*. Retrieved from <https://www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/psicc/recarea/?recid=77620>
- U.S. Forest Service. (n.d.a). *Comanche National Grassland*. Retrieved from https://www.fs.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsinternet/cs/detail!/ut/p/z1/jZBBC4JAEIV_jVdn sAjp5k2i7KRucwmNbTXUkXVr6d8nGEFgm-82j-89mAcEAqgrHrUqTM1d0Yz3iTbnACdFIR7jOEUcw9tAyGeBbP8BaEkefyhamHcA5K7PgeDPA-BuSGJuJeyAVM PINFnUlatQAWI5IVpq_65HuzKmH7Yeemit9RWzaqR_4dbDuUjFgwHxTULfpqnA25rKp30BAH5_Qg!!/dz/d5/L2dBISEvZ0FBIS9nQSEh/?position=Not%20Yet%20Determined.Html&pname=Pike%20and%20San%20Isabel%20National%20Forests%2C%20Cimarron%20and%20Comanche%20National%20Grasslands-%20Districts&ss=110212&navtype=BROWSEBYSUBJECT&pnavid=170000000000000&navid=170110000000000&ttype=detail&cid=fsm9_032695
- U.S. Forest Service. (n.d.b). *Vogel Canyon – Comanche National Grassland*. Retrieved from https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/psicc/about-forest/districts/?cid=fsm9_032726
- Wang, G., Macera, C. A., Scudder-Soucie, B., Schmid, T., Pratt, M., & Buchner, D. (2005). A cost benefit analysis of physical activity using bike/pedestrian trails. *Health Promotion Practice*, 6(2), 174–179. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524839903260687>

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Stakeholder Interview Responses in Aggregate

1. What are your impressions of La Junta Parks and Recreation as a whole (programmatically, facilities, and administratively)?

Parks	A few parks
City Park	Parks spread out across city
College Overlook Park	No indoor recreation facilities
Skate park	Facilities are lacking
Grass, green space	Not much for youth to do
Fishing pond	Not much for the elderly to do
Gazebos	Nothing for adults to do (no adult baseball/basketball/volleyball/softball)
Swimming pool	Need lights on field
Tennis courts	Need lots of volunteers to run programs
Golf course	Some challenges working with educational institutions
Baseball, Tippy Martinez Baseball Field	Don't use parks a lot
Softball, softball field	Needs fixing
Basketball, basketball courts	Responsible for cleaning up fields
Football	Drastically reduced staffing since 2008
Soccer	Need to hire more people
Volleyball, sand volleyball	Parks and recreation works on fun, outdoor stuff
Disc golf	Proud of the staff
Defunct rollerblading program	Staff do a very good job
Youth sports	Staff work very hard
Sporting events	Staff have a lot going on
Fishing derby	Staff are doing the best they can
Early Settlers' Day	Staff overextended, at their limit
Birthday parties	Staff are overwhelmed
Lots of programs	Like Disneyland, most wonderful place in the world
Park system draws kids from large area	Trails
Facilities are kept manicured, beautiful, and perfect	Rodeo stadium
Good inter-organization coordination on facilities	
Lots of work happening on walking trails	

2. What are your opinions about programs offered by the Department? (Quality? Overall Program mix and Quantity? Cost?)

Golf course is beautiful
 Facilities in good condition (skate park, playground, basketball courts)
 Quality okay, could be improved
 Moving in a more beneficial direction
 Don't use parks too much
 Programs use parks facilities and school ones
 Evolving due to personnel changes
 Currently diversifying offerings
 Focus used to be only on baseball
 Bathrooms are being rehabilitated
 Money coming in from soccer
 Staff doing the best they can with the numbers/resources they have
 Tennis courts need to be fixed
 Volleyball net needs to be fixed
 Basketball court is cracked, lines are faded

Requests and need for more soccer programming
 Bathrooms are needed
 Need a recreation center
 Not enough fields for soccer and baseball
 Need to expand facilities
 Not enough programming for adults
 Not enough programming/facilities for older kids
 Roller blading program killed by resurfacing material mistake
 Athletic directors and community disagree on priorities
 Walking trails do not provide needed revenue
 Football helmet certification program
 Kids are kept safe
 Need more programs for kids before high school
 Not enough money for all wanted programs
 More baseball tournaments than anywhere in the US

3. What are your opinions on the quality of the parks and recreation facilities provided by the department (what is appropriate?)

Playground in good condition
 Skate park in good condition
 Basketball courts pretty good
 Playground for younger kids
 Playground outdated
 Playground could be fixed, but not concerned
 Volleyball nets old
 Basketball court cracked floor, lines faded, in bad shape, not standard
 Tennis courts old, floor coming up, unplayable, need upgrades

City spares no expense, best facilities around
 Soccer stadium is finest in the valley
 Facilities open for anyone
 Best fields
 Best swimming pool
 Rodeo grounds leased
 Some people want a shelter for the rodeo stands
 Need the trail system

4. How do you feel about the level of community support the Department receives?

Community is supportive, welcoming
 Community generally happy with fields and programs
 Parks are widely used
 Parks especially used when it's hot
 Community members will step up to organize or support programs they are interested in
 Community support based on specific programs and interests
 Community prefers soccer to baseball

Community members unaware of what is currently offered
 Hard to get increased funding from community leadership (city managers, city council, superintendent, school boards, etc.)
 Community complaints about lack of restrooms
 Dealing with parents is difficult

5. Are there some partnerships you appreciate? Are there potential partnerships that you know of that have not yet materialized?

Fundraisers	Youth Baseball Commission
Attracting/building housing, hotels, restaurants to bring in revenue	Nazarene Church
Local businesses sponsor teams	County commissioners
La Junta Trading	The City of La Junta/city council
Hospital	Rotary
Southeast Health Group	No partnerships
Southeast Mental Health Services	Youth commission
Inspiration Field	Individual donors (ex. Golf lady)
School district/superintendent/school boards	Colorado Health Foundation
College, Otero Junior College	Hospital

6. In what ways do you think the parks and recreation department can improve the community’s health overall? (Follow-up: Are there partnerships with health agencies that could be beneficial?)

Attract more people through events (ex. Obstacle course)	Opened pool despite COVID so kids could have fun
Health fair	Programs get kids away from computers, outside
Zumba at the senior center	Colorado Health Foundation
Exercise classes	Intergenerational park by trails
Runs (5K, 10K)	South East Health Group
Add a workout station	Develop hospital parking lot
Build a rec center with workout facilities and other exercise programming	Trails improve health

7. Funding decisions can sometimes be difficult. The population in La Junta is shrinking. With this in-mind, and keeping in-mind the limitations of public funding, what should the priority of the department be if it’s forced to choose? Acquire available open space or parkland before it’s developed, this may mean open space preservation or additional parks (once it’s gone, it’s gone), or maintaining existing infrastructure at a high level (the longer you wait for repairs, the more expensive repairs are and caring for infrastructure is expensive)?

Maintain and fix existing infrastructure	New land for more parks
Parks and rec already has a lot of land	New land for better activities
Parks and rec doesn’t have any facilities to refurbish	New land for more trails
Build an indoor swimming pool with a hot tub	Cannot defer maintenance
Expand golf course	Focus on creating multigenerational facilities (ex. Parents can go with kids)
Build a rec center	

8. A similar question regarding programing: should programs be kept as affordable as possible for inclusion of the greatest number of residents, or should the programs be “pay to play,” imposing the full direct cost of the programs and overhead on the participants? If you seek a middle-point, where would you lean knowing that higher costs may prove to be a barrier for some underserved residents?

Free
 All programs except for soccer are already subsidized
 Waive fees for seniors
 Charge, but aware of which families cannot afford to pay and provide individual support/adjustments

Charge membership fees for facility use (ex. \$30-40 a month for pickleball or racquetball)
 Charge full costs for all adult programming
 Keep everything as affordable as possible, many poor families in the area
 Ask businesses and employers to cover costs

9. What are your thoughts on the trail system in La Junta?

No trails
 Not many trails
 Trail is rudimentary (dirt, weeds)
 New trail under construction
 Work is being done on trails
 Art is being added to trails
 Trail by the frisbee course
 Downtown trail by Live Well Park
 Too many trails
 Some community members very passionate about trails
 People would be interested in trails
 People want a trail to the river
 People want a dog park by the trail
 Trails get grants, other funding
 Trail projects help clean up La Junta

Make trails to appeal to people from Boulder, Golden, so they want to move to La Junta
 Trails require maintenance
 Not sure if people will use them long-term
 Can't have a nice trail system because of homeless people and kids that will mess it up
 Would prefer to spend money on indoor facilities (track, treadmills) that can be used for walking in all seasons
 Plenty of nice places to walk in La Junta that aren't on trails, waste of money
 Trails are important
 Some community members opposed to trails
 Like trails
 Been trying to get a trail since 1997

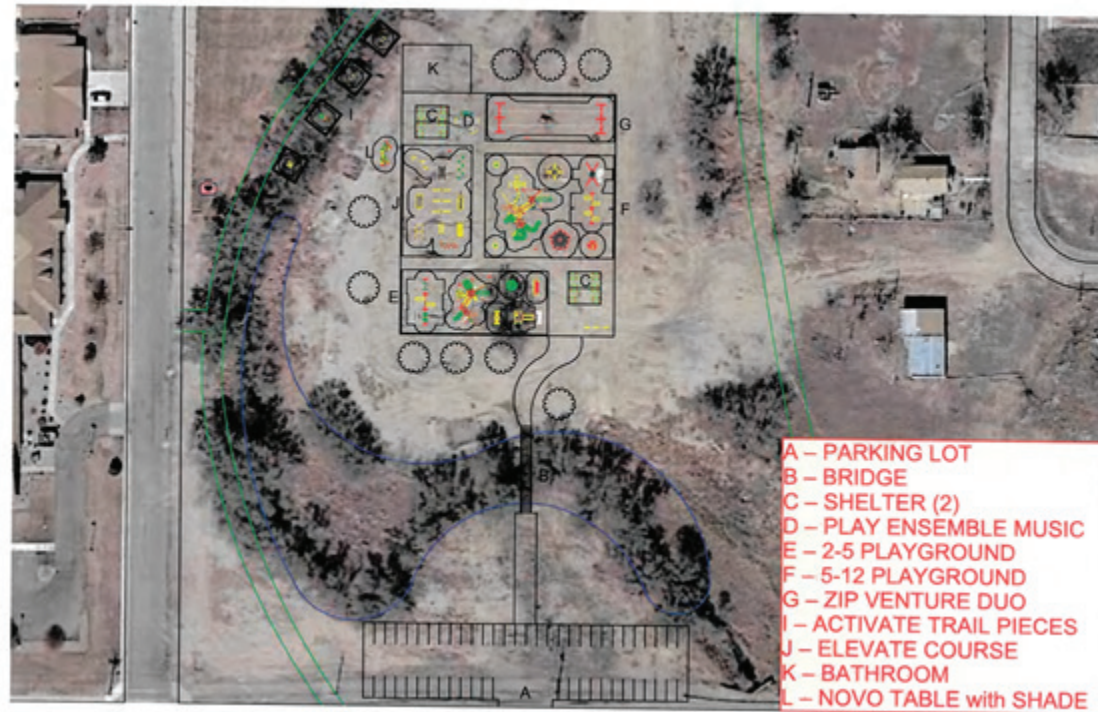
10. If YOU were in charge of La Junta Parks and Recreation, what would you do differently? What would you make sure to do that's the same? (City Council was asked: Is there anything you would like to do differently with La Junta Parks and Recreation? What do you want to make sure is done the same?)

Keep the park the same
 Fix tennis courts
 Fix volleyball net
 Fix/update playground
 Fix basketball court
 Hold more events
 Add different sports that are not available in school
 Organize a summer day camp, including older kids
 Focus more on soccer
 Build on interest in trails, develop more trails
 Organize youth clean-up day
 More youth programming
 More programming for the elderly, lifetime activities
 Add adult sports facilities and programs (ex. volleyball, basketball, softball, baseball, roller hockey, racquetball, pickleball, tennis, soccer)
 Add different types of swings
 Add different activities for older kids, ex. zipline
 Add workout stations
 Add shade protection in the park
 Add a water faucet to the playground and skate park
 Open/add bathrooms
 Build a youth recreation center (with amenities like a workout room, tutoring,

family room, indoor track)
 Add lights on 22nd Street ball field
 Add indoor recreational facilities, multi-use building (ex. With indoor pool, badminton, basketball courts, pickleball, pool tables, game room, tutoring, indoor etc.)
 Make indoor space for sports teams to practice in the winter
 Create more practice space for sports generally
 Add pickleball facilities
 Build bike trails
 Stop adding trails
 Stop putting pianos in parks
 Make more money
 Hire more staff
 Move resources away from walking trails into more diverse projects
 Increase collaboration with other entities in town
 Increase/improve communication with community
 Give advisory board an increased voice
 Add a dog park
 Maintain what is already there
 Build wildlife viewing area by the river
 Build a pump park for BMX bikes

Appendix B: Intergenerational Park Design Concept

Below is the proposed design concept for the Bricks and Tile Park as included in the City's grant application to Great Outdoors Colorado.



Appendix C: Livewell Park Redesign

In June 2020, the City applied for a Revitalizing Main Streets grant through the Colorado Department of Transportation. Part of this grant application included development plans for Livewell Park. The following site description is from the grant application narrative:

At the entrance, our community will be greeted by a labyrinth, to be installed by the local Boy Scout troop from nearby Rocky Ford. They are volunteering for this project to qualify for their Eagle Scout certification. The labyrinth winds in a circle until you reach The Wishing Tree, which has been created and paid for already, a 14' x 8' metal tree that has an open weave texture to the bark: small stones will be available for people to insert into the tree trunk to make a wish. Piers will dot the walls of the site and hold overhead horizontal beams that have flag sunshades attached to them as well as fairy lights for atmosphere. A xylophone and wind chimes made of halved oxygen tanks, chairs, ADAAG and standard tables, seating, and a concrete stage fill the lot. Two of the walls of the 150' x 30' lot will feature a mural of local fauna and flora created by artists at the local junior college: the Robert Hoag Rawlings Foundation has generously funded the paint for the murals, which will be painted by a local arts group, Southeast Colorado Creative Partnership and youth members of Communities That Care, a group that focuses on the health of families in Otero and Crowley counties. The concrete stage, at the end of the lot on the west side, will provide for impromptu speeches, musical performances, and community meetings.

