

Council Meeting: May 21, 2026	Prepared By: Jessica Christensen Buck, Parks and Recreation Manager
Topic: Park Prioritization and Planning	Action Required: Discussion

Summary

Background

On March 12, 2026, the Parks and Trails Commission and City Council held a joint work session that included a discussion regarding future park planning efforts and long-term system planning. During that discussion, there was conversation surrounding the prioritization of undeveloped parks and determining which park sites may warrant further planning and development consideration in the near term.

Park Planning

As a follow-up to that discussion, and the discussion on March 19, 2026 at the Parks and Trails Commission meeting, staff is bringing forward the park sites that meet the criteria discussed during the work session, along with additional context and information that may assist the Commission in discussing and prioritizing future park development efforts. Staff anticipates that establishing general priorities will help guide future capital planning, grant opportunities, and long-range system development strategies.

As part of the long-range system development strategies, discussions of developing a broader park system planning document were had. Staff is including an example from Otsego to demonstrate the range of information and elements that may be incorporated within a Park System Plan (<https://www.otsegomn.gov/DocumentCenter/View/606/Otsego-Master-Plan>). While the scope of such a document is yet to be determined, common components often include:

- Current park system overview
- Needs assessment
 - Existing city amenities, neighboring community amenities, options provided by other organizations within the area, etc.
- Implementation
 - Priorities, funding options, funding sources.
 - Some can include concepts for park projects, but the cost increases
- Trails and connectivity
- Natural resources assessment
- Capital, operations, and maintenance costs
 - Capital costs, operating/maintenance costs, lifespans, replacement plans (CIP)
- Wayfinding
 - Council approved staff to work with HKGi on Wayfinding, with the intention to come with an update to the June 18, 2026, Parks and Trails Commission meeting.
- Recreation trends/assessment
 - At this time, staff feels that this would not be needed, as we understand the limited offerings due to staffing, funding, and other restrictions.

Park Prioritization

To assist with discussion regarding park development priorities, staff has compiled the following contextual information regarding parks with ongoing development considerations.

SE Corcoran/Tavera - Neighborhood Park

- Approved by City Council in 2022.
- The area has been graded, but no park amenities currently exist on site.
- Staff frequently receives questions and requests from residents regarding the future development

timeline within this area.

NE Corcoran/Bellwether - Neighborhood Park

- Approved by City Council in phases in 2018, 2020, and 2021.
- Previously used for construction staging, but is planned to be seeded this summer to allow for more immediate passive use. Seeding is not intended to represent the final park design.
- Preliminary discussions have occurred with the Bellwether Veteran's Group regarding the possibility of incorporating a Veteran-focused element, as charitable gambling funds may be eligible for Veteran-related projects.
- At this time, no formal planning has occurred regarding park amenities or future site features, but staff frequently receives questions and requests from residents for this site.

NE Corcoran/Bellwether - Open Space Park

- Approved by City Council in phases in 2018, 2020, and 2022.
- Existing improvements include a paved trail loop, future trail connections, and a boardwalk currently under construction.
- Potential future additions could include bench bump-outs with concrete pads.
- Staff has received inquiries regarding completion of this area, though the park is generally further along than many of the other park sites currently under discussion.

Heritage Park - Community Park

- The west side of the park is currently under construction to replace the aging playground, add paved parking and trails, and construct a new park building.
- Future phases will be necessary to continue improvements throughout the park, particularly within the pickleball court and splash pad areas, which were designed with future improvements in mind.
- Long-term concepts have also included updates and potential relocation of the hockey and ice rink areas to the east side of the park.
- Given the scale of the current construction project, staff has received feedback to shift focus toward other park sites following project completion to continue addressing needs throughout multiple areas of the community.

County Road 116/Olde Sturbridge - Open Space Park

- Approved by City Council in 2021.
- Potential future improvements may include trail development, bench bump-outs, and improved site access.
- Access into the area is currently limited, which may impact the feasibility or effectiveness of near-term development efforts.

SE Corcoran/Cook Lake Highlands - Neighborhood Park

- Approved by City Council in 2022.
- The site is a smaller natural area that currently includes a small trail loop.
- Future improvements could include additional passive amenities such as bump-outs.

County Road 116 - Linear Park

- Improvements throughout this corridor may continue to occur incrementally as future development opportunities arise.
- A portion of this park is included within in the May 21, 2026, Parks and Trails Commission meeting and is proposed for development following temporary use as construction staging near St. Therese.

Staff is seeking Commission discussion and feedback regarding:

- Potential priorities for undeveloped park sites, from the park sites listed above.
- Planning elements that the Commission believes would be most valuable in future park system planning processes/plans.
- If certain planning components could assist in establishing future park development priorities and long-range implementation strategies.

Financial/Budget

Funding for future planning and development would be supported through the Park Dedication Fund, which is also the primary source for park capital projects. While using these funds for planning reduces

the amount available for future construction projects, it can help establish clearer priorities and direction for undeveloped park sites.

At this stage, the discussion will help inform the scope of a potential Comprehensive Park System Plan, particularly for undeveloped parks. Having defined priorities and timelines in place can improve the City's ability to pursue grant funding and other external resources, while also supporting more strategic long-term budgeting for park development.

Recommendation

Staff recommends the Commission discuss and provide feedback regarding park development priorities, long-term planning considerations, and potential components of a future Comprehensive Park System Plan.

Council Action

Staff recommends the Commission discuss and provide feedback regarding park development priorities, long-term planning considerations, and potential components of a future Comprehensive Park System Plan.

Attachments

1. [PTC Mtg - 3.19.2026 Park System Plan Slides.pdf](#)