

**PLAN
WHERE
YOU**

Play!



MASTER PLAN 2024- 2034

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Contents

- Organizational Ecosystem 4
- Findings 6
- Capital Infrastructure Needs 8
- Level of Service Assessment 10
- Strategic Initiatives 14
- Recommendations 16



INTRODUCTION

Step into the future with the Gilbert Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Master Plan (Plan), where we invite you to embrace the mantra, “Plan Where You Play.” This 10-year Plan serves as a crucial roadmap for the sustainable development and enhancement of community leisure spaces. It offers long-term strategic direction, ensuring that recreational facilities and programs align with the evolving needs of residents. By strategically allocating resources and planning for the future, this forward-thinking plan establishes

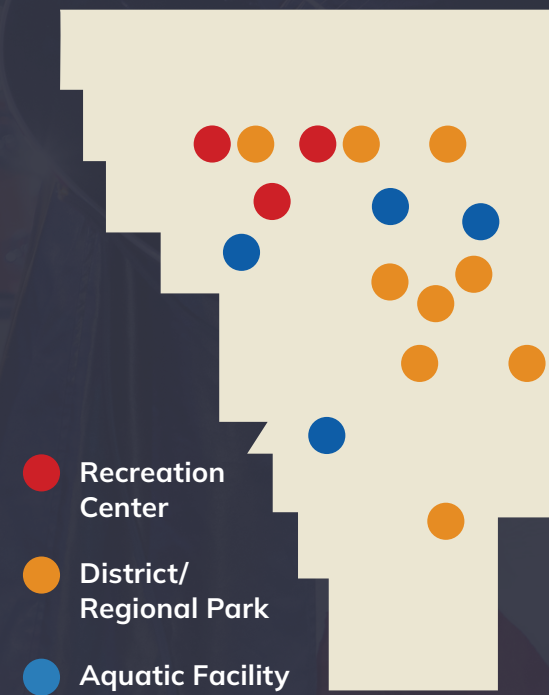
a foundation for vibrant, inclusive, and accessible recreational opportunities.

“Plan Where You Play” encapsulates this commitment to creating spaces and experiences that go beyond the ordinary. In this executive summary, we provide a roadmap for the future, outlining strategic initiatives that embody the department’s values of fairness, trust, and innovation.

The Vision: “Gilbert Parks and Recreation is committed to providing superior parks, recreation, and cultural programs which exceed customer expectations, enhance the quality of life, and promote lifelong leisure and educational pursuits.”



ORGANIZATIONAL ECOSYSTEM



Over **600** acres of developed parks

Over **150,000** program enrollments annually

3 recreation centers

20 neighborhood parks

9 district parks

12 lakes

4 aquatic facilities

2 libraries

Demographic Assessment

ADAPTABILITY FOR SENIORS

As population dynamics evolve, the department must remain responsive, continuously reviewing demographic changes to meet service demands. While the community skews younger compared to state and national averages, the senior population is growing, necessitating adaptability in programs, spaces, and services.

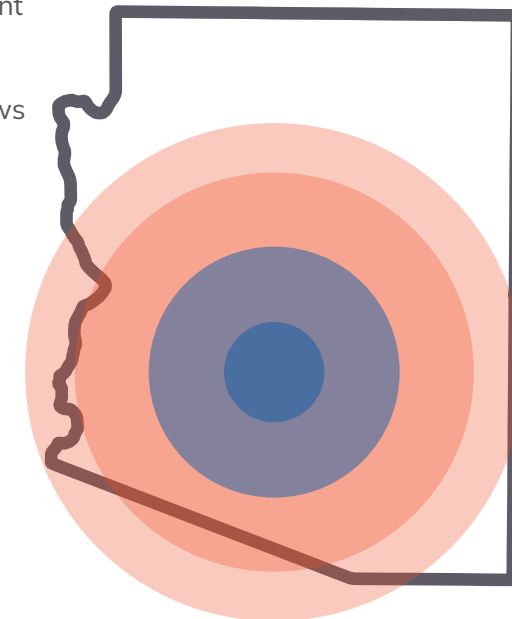
EQUITABLE ACCESS

Financially, Gilbert residents exhibit strength, with household incomes surpassing state and national averages. This stability suggests a willingness to invest in high-quality parks and recreation services. However, ensuring equitable access for all residents, regardless of financial status, remains crucial.

INCLUSIVE PROGRAMMING

Gilbert is witnessing a growing mix of racial and ethnic backgrounds. This highlights the importance of creating culturally sensitive programs in parks and recreation services to accommodate a wide

POPULATION CHANGE (2000-2034)



115,918
2000

209,236
2010

284,510
2023

330,000
2034

range of residents. The data collected informs the overarching plan, ensuring recommendations are equitable and inclusive across all resident demographic and income levels.

Community Needs Assessment

87% visited a park or facility in the past year



43% visit a park or facility weekly



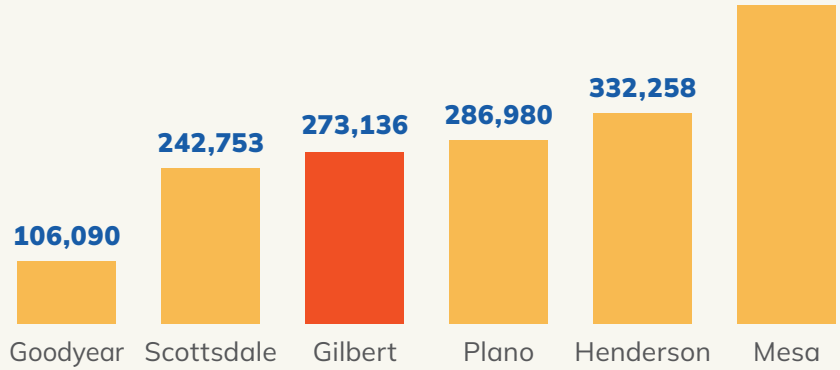
61% participated in a program in the past year



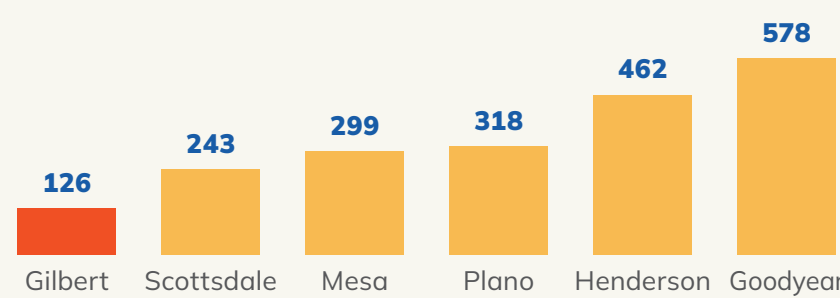
93% of residents indicated that high-quality park and multi-use path experiences are very important or important to the quality of life in Gilbert.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS FINDINGS

Comparative municipalities (population):



Total number of FTEs



Fewest full-time equivalent positions



Ranked in the lower-middle for capital budget funding



Second lowest operating budget



Second highest total revenue to total operating expenditures ratio (cost recovery)



THINK TANK FINDINGS

The Think Tank process gathers input from park and recreation professionals outside of a community. For Gilbert, the Think Tank reached out to experts in the Phoenix metropolitan area, including professionals from cities such as Avondale, Buckeye, Chandler, Mesa, Scottsdale, and Tempe, as well as Maricopa County Parks and the towns of Oro Valley and Queen Creek.

Emerging Trends

- Water Conservation
- Long-Range Infrastructure Planning
- Inclusion

Challenges

- Demographic/Environmental Changes
- Population Growth
- Infrastructure Needs

Future Impacts

- Population Growth
- Equity of Offerings

COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

The community priorities identified in the Plan are rooted in feedback gathered from more than 61,000 community touchpoints. They are further understood through presentations, discussions, and visioning efforts conducted with key Town stakeholders. Utilizing innovative engagement methods, such as community-wide ice cream giveaways and neighborhood nights at local breweries, the level of participation surpassed national best practices. Engagement efforts encompassed various approaches, including

an interactive project website, statistically valid surveys, open public surveys, crowd-sourcing, focus group sessions, facility vision boards, and customized youth engagement. The scale and results of these engagement efforts have been impressive:

MORE THAN
61,000
TOUCHPOINTS

UNPRECEDENTED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND FEEDBACK

- Over **9,000** online visits to the master plan site (Social Pinpoint) with 890 responses and additional interactions
- **537** statistically valid surveys completed
- **21** “pop-up” engagement events with **9,048** points of feedback
- **12** Focus Group sessions
- **17-foot** traveling mural that made 12 stops around town
- Free ice cream day where **1,600** treats were given away with input and awareness opportunities
- Design Your Own Playground Workshop with **143** youth registrants
- Beverage for Your Thoughts at OHSO Brewery resulting in **150** drink giveaways with interaction and awareness
- Social media campaigns had **10,102** engagements





KEY CAPITAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND FUNDING NEEDS

This plan is geared toward preserving and safeguarding the department's current resources, while also setting up the operational foundations needed to realize the Town's "City of the Future" vision. This plan provides specific action items to support strategic initiatives. The Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) outlines the expected expenses for the Plan's recommendations and establishes a roadmap for the next 10 years. Additional CIP needs will be required for park and site specific planning needs as these key amenities are refined into the future.

Over **\$1 billion** of funding needs will be considered into the next decade.

This is what the community identified as the top priority for the department for the next ten years. The Town of Gilbert is exploring options for how to fund these priorities.



HIGH-PRIORITY CAPITAL NEEDS

- Park Development
- Aquatic/Pool Facilities/ Splashpads
- Recreation Center with Indoor Fitness/ Playground Amenities
- Sports Fields
- Garden Spaces
- Multi-Use Trails/Paths
- Pickleball Courts (indoor and outdoor)
- Shade
- Public Art



MEDIUM-PRIORITY CAPITAL NEEDS

- Skate Park
- Dog Parks
- Nature Center/Programs
- Disc Golf
- Food Options
- Art Performances/ Special Events
- Arts Programming
- Amusement Park/ Petting Zoo
- Outdoor Playground/ Exercise Equipment
- Adult Enrichment Activities



FIELD NEEDS

Current Number	Final Build-Out
MULTI-USE	
18	32
DIAMOND	
24	34

CAPITAL INVESTMENT



79%

of Gilbert residents indicated support for improvements and new developments for Gilbert Parks and Recreation.



LEVEL OF SERVICE (LOS) ASSESSMENT

The LOS analysis serves as a wide-ranging evaluation of the current state of Gilbert's parks and recreation services, with the aim of assessing its effectiveness in meeting the needs and expectations of residents.

Parks and recreation plays a crucial role in enhancing the quality of life for individuals and families, providing opportunities for leisure, recreation, and community engagement. Therefore, it is essential to ensure that parks and recreation facilities are accessible, well-maintained, and offer a diverse range of programs and amenities that cater to the interests and preferences of a community.



Only **30%** of residents live within a 10-minute walk of a Gilbert park



Gilbert parkland provides only **3.1 acres** per 1,000 residents versus NRPA recommended **10.1 acres**

Gilbert parks rank higher than the national average with a good to excellent rating of **96%**



Multi-use paths are important to Gilbert residents. Residents would like to see path improvements on:

- connectivity
- maintenance
- adequacy of lighting
- feeling of safety

Fun Fact:

Gilbert's 5.3 million visits to parks, recreation facilities, and multi-use paths in 2022 compares to the **Grand Canyon**, at 5 million visits per year!



Recreation Programs

The recreation assessment evaluated the department's program offerings, aiming to:



Provide detailed insight into program offerings



Identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats



Highlight program categories, gaps, and future considerations



Over **150,000** annual program enrollments.



Adults, representing **70.5%** of the population, are served by only **41%** of programs.



Gilbert offers comprehensive and diverse programming, far exceeding the national average of offerings by typical providers.



25% of Gilbert residents report that they cannot participate in classes because they are full.



On average, only **3%** of Gilbert's classes and programs are canceled, which is far below the national average.



No recreation centers exist in southern Gilbert.



PROGRAMMING NEEDS

- Align programming with community priorities
- Address gaps in service areas
- Increase aquatic recreation opportunities
- Expand cultural experiences
- Increase collaborations to provide more programs for senior and teen services
- Offer more introductory learn-and-explore programs targeted for new participants
- Increase indoor recreation opportunities with adaptive and inclusive spaces

Organizational Assessment

The Town of Gilbert is a high-performing service organization, employing over 1,200 people who provide roughly 250 lines of service to the community. Our mission is to **Anticipate. Create. Help People.** We're working to become the City of the Future and keep the thriving community that Gilbert is today well into the future. We are proud of our culture, which reflects our shared values, beliefs, and practices. It's our behavioral compass, and who we aspire to be.

For the past several decades, the Town has taken tremendous pride in its lean organizational structure, yet it is becoming evident that this model is not sustainable, especially with a growing and diversifying community.

To effectively address both current and future needs, it is essential to increase the number of employees to better align with staffing levels observed in comparable municipalities.

We recommend that Gilbert consider the implementation of a phased approach to increase staff by 32% over the next several years to meet current demands on the parks and recreation system.



BERRYDUNN RECOMMENDS THAT GILBERT CONSIDER A PHASED INCREASE TO STAFFING LEVELS TO SUPPORT MASTER PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

107

Current Full-Time Staffing

CURRENT

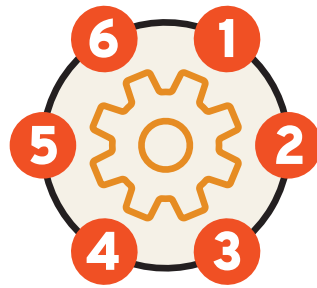
FUTURE

+32%


Recommended Increase

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Six strategic initiatives have been identified as the cornerstone of this Plan. By aligning resources, efforts, and priorities with these strategic initiatives, a roadmap for success is forged, guiding decisions and actions in the years to come.



1. Preserve Existing Assets




Taking care of existing parks, facilities, and amenities is essential for maintaining a high standard of service delivery. This initiative involves proactive maintenance and preservation efforts to ensure that parks and recreational spaces remain safe, attractive, and functional for residents to enjoy.

2. Excel Through Innovation



Innovation is key to driving continuous improvement and staying responsive to evolving community needs and trends. This initiative encourages the exploration and adoption of innovative approaches, technologies, and best practices in parks and recreation management.

3. Create a Connected Community



Creating a Connected Community focuses on nurturing relationships and a feeling of belonging in parks and recreational areas. This initiative prioritizes community engagement and interaction by organizing events, volunteer programs, and social activities. Additionally, we emphasize the development of multi-use trails, offering opportunities for individuals to connect with nature and each other during outdoor recreation.

4. Share Our Story



Effective communication and storytelling are essential for building awareness, support, and engagement around parks and recreation initiatives. This initiative emphasizes the importance of strategic communication strategies, branding, and outreach efforts to effectively communicate the value and impact of parks and recreation services to residents, stakeholders, and decision-makers.

5. Opportunities for All



Ensuring equitable access to parks and recreation services for all residents is a core principle of this initiative. It involves addressing barriers to participation, such as geographic, economic, cultural, and physical barriers, to ensure that everyone in the community has the opportunity to benefit from parks and recreation amenities and programs.

6. Develop Our Team



This initiative prioritizes expanding the department's staff size and training opportunities to meet the community's growing demands. As the population continues to expand, so do the needs for parks, recreational facilities, and programs. By increasing the staff size and focusing on staff development, the department can better allocate resources, enhance service delivery, and effectively address emerging challenges.

These strategic initiatives are in line with Gilbert's mission to
Anticipate. Create. Help People.

PLAN WHERE YOU PLAY RECOMMENDATIONS

“Plan Where You Play” is a roadmap for the department’s next 10 years to help support creating spaces and experiences that go beyond the ordinary. The six strategic initiatives that have been developed as an outcome for the master plan, serve as a cornerstone for long-term success. Through these initiatives, the aim is to enrich the quality of life for all residents and ensure that parks and recreation services evolve in step with the diverse needs of the community.

These strategic initiatives are supported by the following recommended actions for success. Over 90 actions are identified in alignment with the strategic initiatives. Detailed recommendations (including capital improvement plan needs) are outlined in the full master plan document. This executive summary is intended to capture key highlights of recommended actions.



Recreation Programming

Continuously adjust and align programming in responsive to the community’s evolving needs.

- Grow programs focused on specific cultural experiences and/or celebrations.
- Address identified programmatic gaps.
- Grow partnerships with other service providers (especially in teen programming).
- Increase marketing and promotion of programs and special events to underserved populations geographically and culturally.
- Consider pursuing a new recreation center to provide expanded indoor recreation opportunities to meet established community need.
- Consider establishing a dedicated inclusive and adaptive program space with specialized equipment and services.
- Consider expanding a pool to have year-round access to expand programming opportunities.
- Review programs in decline of life cycle stage; establish decommissioning or rejuvenation plans for each.
- Conduct program and language audits for cultural relevancy and sensitivity.
- Review the departmental equity analysis spectrum and establish improvement goals.

Level of Service (LOS)

Address gaps in access to parks and facilities throughout Gilbert.

- Adopt a LOS standard of four recreational components and access to a multi-use path in 10-minute walk service areas.
- Develop, partner with, or acquire facilities to help bridge the gap between existing and needed recreational facilities, particularly in underserved locations.
- Implement maintenance and operations management standards.
- Perform an annual park audit using GRASP® GIS. Prioritize improvements based on annual identification of low-scoring components.
- Adopt standards for park features, such as benches, pour-in-place playground surfacing, ramadas, signage, courts, and trash receptacles.
- Considering projected population increases, consider developing a minimum of 22 acres of parkland by 2034 to maintain the current LOS of 3 acres per 1,000 residents.
- Add amenities at existing parks to support and enhance the inclusivity and accessibility of outdoor activities.
- Consider all abilities and ages when developing a play space.

Opportunities for All (OFA)

Commit to continuous improvement in providing more accessible and equitable services.

- Continue to develop program materials that are multilingual.
- Become more visible in the community by having booths at local cultural events.
- Review program policies and procedures on scholarships.
- Create content relevant to other cultures (consider images and captions both in social media and on the website).
- Review website usability features and make improvements to create a more intuitive experience.
- Include entire department in establishing goals and metrics for the department.
- Host quarterly employee engagement activities to be inclusive of all employees including those that work evenings and weekends.
- Consider a mentorship program for employees to engage with leaders and encourage the development of their career.
- Coordinate department-wide OFA learning and development opportunities such as Certified Autism Center training and dementia-friendly city training currently offered by the department.
- Consider integrating elements of NRPA's health equity framework to create more equitable spaces, programs, and services to advance community health and well-being.
- Form a workgroup to review registration process through the lens of language access and inclusion.
- Consider forming an advisory or steering committee consisting of members from the community-at-large to create informal and formal engagement opportunities with department staff and leadership.

Organizational Adjustments

Provide staffing and resources to be responsive to community needs and address growth.

- Consider an increase in FTE positions and the creation of an organizational structure necessary for success.
- Address scope of staff responsibilities to improve efficiencies.
- Improve internal communication.
- Provide necessary material, equipment, and resources to support service needs.
- Increase training and succession planning.
- Address customer service improvement needs such as registration software deficiencies.

Capital Improvement Plan

Support **Plan Where You Play** outcomes over the next 10 years.

- Invest in the development of parks to meet the evolving needs and population of the community.
- Invest in existing parks to maintain quality spaces and respond to diversifying community needs.



Discover the possibilities and be part of the Gilbert Parks and Recreation experience – where planning and playing harmoniously come together for a brighter, more vibrant community.



Further details of Play Where You Play research, findings, and recommendations are provided in the full plan document and on our website: <http://gilbertaz.gov/prmasterplan>.

Completed in 2024, Play Where You Play is an exciting and community-centered planning effort. By strategically allocating resources and planning for the future, this forward-thinking plan establishes a foundation for vibrant, inclusive, and accessible recreational opportunities.



PLAN WHERE YOU *Play!*

gilbert 

