



City of St. Louis

FRANCIS PARK STRATEGIC PLAN

May 2010

SWT Design | EDSI

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CITY OF ST. LOUIS

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INTRODUCTION



FRANCIS PARK is located in the historic St. Louis Hills neighborhood in the south west portion of the City of St. Louis. It is one of several neighborhood parks in this region of the city, however it is the most active park and it serves as a community landmark. It is home to many community wide events that bring “life” to the south west side of the city. The park is approximately 60 acres in size and fits neatly into the gridded street system of St. Louis Hills. It is bordered by Nottingham Avenue on its north side, Tamm Avenue on its east side, Eichelberger Street on its south side and Donovan Avenue on its west side.

The park is well used and beloved by area residents. The community including, the St. Louis Hills Neighborhood Association, has continually rallied around the park to help maintain its condition and aesthetics. Despite these efforts, some of the park’s infrastructure has deteriorated and is in need of repair. Conditions of the existing sewer system, for example, leave large portions of the park flooded and non-usable during any rain event. In addition, some existing amenities that date back to the parks conception have seen great wear and are in need of updating.

In September of 2009, the City of St. Louis began this strategic planning process to enhance the park, which is part of the greater St. Louis City park system, as well as the lives of area residents who utilize the park on a daily basis. The strategic plan was developed to compliment earlier planning studies that have been completed for the park and to bring these foundational studies together to create a comprehensive plan for the park reflecting current conditions, activities and needs.



THE STRATEGIC PLAN for Francis Park was created using a four step process that included input from the community, the St. Louis Hills Neighborhood Association, the steering committee and city staff. The steps of the process included data collection, inventory & analysis, preliminary conceptual design and final concept design. This four step process resulted in a comprehensive strategic plan that meets the recreational needs and desires of the community and creates a framework for implementation. The strategic plan addresses the needs of the community through design concepts that provide short and long-term recommendations with order-of-magnitude cost opinions. The plan will serve as a valuable resource to the city by providing an analysis of the existing conditions, a record process of input, a summary of recommendations, and a summary of fund opportunities for the development of the park.

Images provided by St. Louis Hills Association

THE PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY used in preparing the strategic plan included meeting with city staff, the steering committee and the general public, while also researching the site and collecting base information. This information included maps, photographs and existing planning documentation. This data was then combined with design concepts to produce an innovative plan the City of St. Louis can implement as smaller projects and in phases. City staff, steering committee and public input in the planning process were pivotal to the creation of the final strategic plan.



*David Rowland Francis. Secretary of Interior, Governor of Missouri
In 1916 he gave 60 acres of land to the city of Saint Louis as a Christmas gift. Today it is a park that bears his name.*



PLANNING PROCESS

Task One – Data Collection

Base Map Collection: Gathered existing base maps, surveys, and aerial photographs of the park.

Previous Study Review: Reviewed the 2005 Strategic Plan developed by the St. Louis Hills Neighborhood Association and the 2001 Tree Inventory of the park. This information was a critical part of the planning process of the 2010 strategic plan.

Site Visits and Inventory: Conducted several walking tours of the park to view, photograph, and inventory existing conditions.

Collaboration: Met with members of the city staff, steering committee and the general public, to obtain input and identify program items for the park.

Task Two – Analysis and Program Development

Evaluation: Evaluated natural features, hydrology, and topography. Also reviewed all existing site amenities, including site lighting, structures, hardscape, recreation facilities, and landscape.

Identification: Identified and evaluated opportunities and constraints within the site for passive and active recreation.

The team developed design alternatives that gave special consideration to staff, steering committee, and community input. These concepts were presented to the steering committee on November 20th, 2009. Following review and discussion, the concepts were finalized to be presented in a public forum.

Two preliminary concept designs for the park were presented by the design team to the community in the first of two public forums. The meeting was held in a workshop format at Bishop Dubourg High School on December 5, 2009. Community members were invited to ask questions, express desires and concerns about the concepts. Copies of the community interest survey were distributed at the public forum for additional comment.

Francis Park Strategic Plan



St. Louis Hills Neighborhood Association
Francis Park Committee

Suggestion	1 - Low Priority	2- Med / Low Priority	3 - Medium Priority	4 - Med High Priority	5 - High Priority	Total (7.5 or better)
Improve Water supply system - fix leaks	0	0	0	4	8	11.2
Annual Tree Reforestation	0	0	0	3	8	10.4
More Frequent Trash Pick-up	0	0	2	4	6	10.4
More Trash Cans	0	1	1	4	6	10.2
Annual Tree Pruning	1	0	1	1	8	9.6
Fill in & reseed lower areas that flood and hold water	0	2	0	6	4	9.6
2-way Facing Benches along Tamm Ave (sledding hill)	0	2	0	6	4	9.6
Add More Benches throughout the Park	0	1	3	4	4	9.4
Part Time (SLHNA - financed) park employee for Maint	0	0	4	6	2	9.2

(2005 Plan, See Appendix)



1 Children's Play Area



2 Tennis



3 Baseball / Softball



4 Racket Ball / Hand Ball

Survey Development: A community interest survey was developed by the design team to acquire feedback about the existing conditions of the park and the desires of park users. It was distributed via email, by the steering committee, and to various community groups. The design team also presented the survey to students of Word of Life Lutheran School that is adjacent to the park. Students were invited to take the survey home and share with parents and family members. The survey and survey results can be found in the appendix of this report. There were 129 respondents to the survey.

Task Three and Four – Conceptual Design and Final Strategic Plan

The final tasks involved the development of the design concepts based upon the needs and program items identified in tasks one and two. This information was compiled and a narrative was developed to create the Francis Park Strategic Plan.



5 Central Corridor Event Space



A week after the first public forum, the concepts and a summary of the community input, were reviewed with the steering committee. The steering committee identified refinements and confirmed design direction for the final strategic plan.

The first draft of the final strategic plan design was presented to the steering committee on January 22, 2010. The plan was revised per discussion with the steering committee.

The final strategic plan design was presented to the community at a second public forum at a St. Louis Hills Neighborhood Association meeting on March 25, 2010.

With confirmation of the final strategic plan design, the plan report, including opinions of probable cost, were prepared for recommended improvements. The opinions of probable cost were reviewed and revised to create a series of opinions based on a phased installation of improvements.

Financing alternatives available to help generate revenue for proposed projects were identified.

On April 7th, the final strategic plan report was compiled and presented to the planning commission based on all the above information.

Please note that the Francis Park Strategic plan is a work in progress. Recommendations made within the document speak to the needs and desires at the time it was prepared. As the City of St. Louis begins the phased implementation of the plan, it is important to keep in mind the difficulties of anticipating exact budgets, time lines and opportunities. For this reason, it is recommended that this plan be reviewed and updated periodically to ensure it continues to be based on current data and standards.



Francis Park Community Interest Survey

The St. Louis City Parks and Recreation Department would like your input to help plan future improvements in Francis Park. Your opinion is important! Please let your voice be heard by filing out this survey. It will take about 10 minutes to complete. Please return the survey, by November 20th, 2009, to Alderwoman Donna Baringer via email, baringerd@stlouiscity.com (please put "Francis Park Master Plan" in the subject line), or via standard mail, at St. Louis City Hall, Room 230, 1200 Market Street, St. Louis, MO 63103.

We appreciate your time and help with this effort!

1. Please indicate if you or any one in your family has used any of the following amenities in Francis Park. If you circle "Yes" please rate the physical condition of the amenity by circling a number to the right of the amenity listed.

Name of Amenity	Do you use this amenity?		If "Yes", how would you rate the condition of the amenity?			
	Yes	No	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
A. Tennis Courts	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
B. Walking Paths	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
C. Lily Pond	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
D. Handball Courts	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
E. Baseball Fields	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
F. Drainage Systems	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
G. Playground	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
H. Restrooms	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
I. Park Lighting	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
J. Racket Ball Courts	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
K. Roller Hockey Rink	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
L. Park Landscape	Yes	No	4	3	2	1
M. General Park Character	Yes	No	4	3	2	1

2. On the following list, please indicate no more than five (5) projects you'd like to see completed in Francis Park.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> A. Renovate/improve tennis courts | <input type="checkbox"/> B. Renovate/improve handball courts |
| <input type="checkbox"/> C. Renovate/improve baseball fields | <input type="checkbox"/> D. Renovate/improve lily ponds |
| <input type="checkbox"/> E. Renovate/improve restrooms | <input type="checkbox"/> F. Improve park drainage |
| <input type="checkbox"/> G. Improve the playground | <input type="checkbox"/> H. Add youth soccer fields |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I. Improve park security | <input type="checkbox"/> J. Add separate running path |
| <input type="checkbox"/> K. Teen Activity Area | <input type="checkbox"/> L. Renovate/improve raquetball courts |
| <input type="checkbox"/> M. Create more natural/wildlife areas | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> N. Provide interpretive/educational opportunities | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> O. Permanent bandstand/pavilion | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> P. Add park picnic pavilions (Holding 10-15 people) | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Q. Add bike lanes on streets surrounding Francis Park | |

HISTORY OF FRANCIS PARK



Rare photo of Ex-President Grover Cleveland, President Theodore Roosevelt, Ex-Secretary of the Interior David R. Francis at the World's Exposition in St. Louis, 1903. Image courtesy of NJ Div. of Parks and Forestry, State Park Service, Grover Cleveland Birthplace State Historic Site.

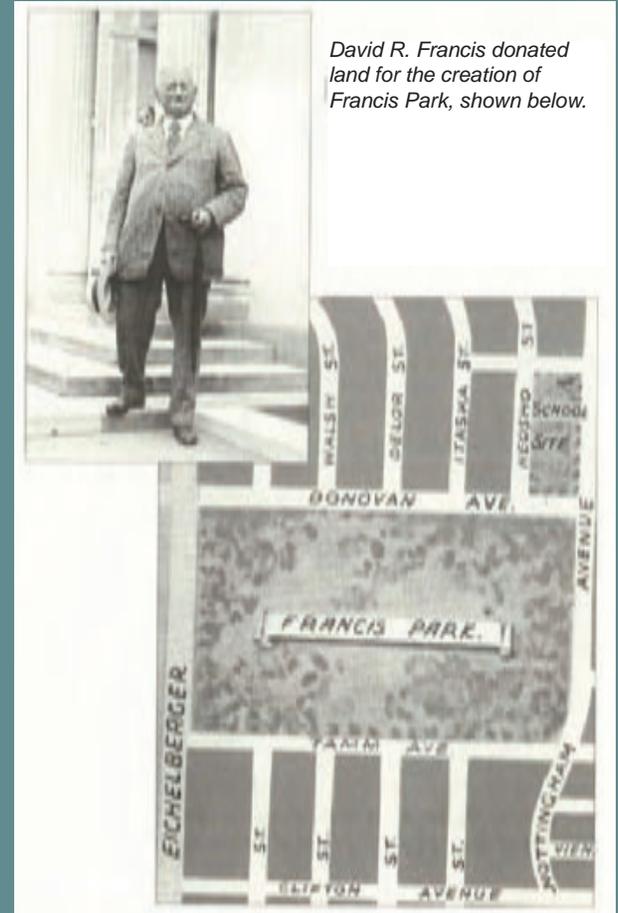
In 1884 David Rowland Francis, Governor of the state of Missouri between 1889 and 1893, became owner of the land that constitutes Francis Park. On the land, he established a homestead and vast farm. Upon the turn of the century he was made President of the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition. Francis originally considered use of his farmland, including the future Francis Park, as a site for the World's Fair. However, logistics and limited transportation made this consideration illogical. Forest Park was instead chosen as the site for the historic event. In 1916, following the success of the World's Fair, Francis was appointed U.S. Ambassador to Russia by President Woodrow Wilson. The following year, Francis gifted the City of St. Louis 60 acres of land. This land was known as Francis Farm and remained unimproved for nearly 15 years. It was utilized as a rural meeting place, picnic area and hunting grounds until the 1930's when St. Louis Hills began to develop as a suburban residential enclave. David Francis died January 15, 1927, before the boom of development in St. Louis Hills and before the park was officially established by the city. Federal Relief Administration Funds were used for construction of many of the park's early amenities in the 30's and the park was officially named Francis Park at that time.



1961 Park Plan



David R. Francis touching the button to open the 1904 World's Fair on Opening Day, 30 April 1904. Photograph by Jessie Tarbox Beals, 1904.



David R. Francis donated land for the creation of Francis Park, shown below.

CONTEXT

Francis Park is one of 105 parks operated and maintained by the City of St. Louis. The park is located in the heart of the historic St. Louis Hills Neighborhood, which is bound by Chippewa Street to the northwest and north, Hampton Avenue to the east, Gravois Avenue to the southeast, and the city limits to the southwest. It is classified as a neighborhood park and is not intended to be used for programmed activities that attract city wide users. Although Francis Park serves as a neighborhood park, at 60 acres in size, it is slightly larger than a typical neighborhood park. The park is easily accessible from throughout the neighborhood. Park users walk, bike and drive to the park to access its many passive and active recreation amenities. Bike St. Louis has routes that run adjacent to the park and tie into major trail ways. Street parking is available along the perimeter of the park.

The St. Louis Hills neighborhood is quite stable and has maintained a fairly constant population, despite fluctuations in other areas of the city. In 1990, the population of St. Louis Hills was 7,510 and ten years later, in 2000, the population had grown to 7,560. The neighborhood has been a “constant” in the city from its inception. Many residents attribute a strong religious foundation to this long standing reputation. The streets surrounding Francis Park depict this assertion. Churches were constructed at each of the intersections adjacent to the park’s four corners. Original planners of the neighborhood believed the religious roots would make the neighborhood stronger. Additionally, two of the churches, St. Gabriel and Word of Life, have schools associated with them. The elementary and junior high school teachers and students at these institutions regularly use the park for outdoor recreation and educational purposes.

Francis Park is surrounded by residential properties but the lively retail districts of Chippewa Street and Hampton Avenue are within a few blocks. Many restaurants, local small businesses, schools and churches are within walking distance of the park, including one of the city’s most famous landmarks, Ted Drewes Frozen custard. The park is an integral part of the urban fabric of south city. Its centralized location, existing amenities and historic character make it an enduring part of the neighborhood and help keep St. Louis Hills a vibrant part of the city.





Hope United Church of Christ



St. Gabriel Archangel Catholic Church



Ascension Lutheran Church



St. Thomas Orthodox Romanian Church

EXISTING CONDITIONS

TREE SPECIES FREQUENCY

Species	Frequency	Percent of Total
Pine, Austrian	90	10.3%
Sycamore	74	8.5%
Baldcypress	70	8.0%
Pine, Scotch	56	6.4%
Oak, Pin	54	6.2%
Spruce, Norway	40	4.6%
Pine, White	37	4.2%
Ash, Green	36	4.1%
Elm, American	36	4.1%
Hawthorn	28	3.2%
Maple, Amur	27	
Hackberry	25	
Maple, Sugar	24	
Birch, River	23	
Maple, Silver	18	
Dogwood, Flowering	17	
Oak, Red	17	
Smoketree	17	
Redbud	16	
Redcedar, Eastern	16	
Oak, Shingle	15	
Cherry, Black	14	
Crabapple	11	
Maple, Red	11	
Percimmon	10	
Sassafras	9	
Spruce, Colorado	9	
Arborvitae	8	
Ailanthus	7	
Cedar	7	
Honeylocust	5	
Linden, Littleleaf	5	
Ash, White	4	
Chestnut, Ch.	4	
Oak, White	4	
Oak, Bur	3	
Serviceberry	3	
Spruce, Blue	3	
Tulip Poplar	3	
Locust, Black	2	
Mulberry	2	
Pine, Red	2	
Yellowwood	2	
Birch, White	1	
Blackgum	1	
Elm, Siberian	1	
Hemlock	1	
Holly, American	1	
Linden, Redmond	1	
Linden, Silver	1	
Oak, Black	1	
Walnut, Black	1	

GENERAL CHARACTER AND AMENITIES

Francis Park is a neighborhood park that functions as an oasis of passive and active recreation amenities within the densely populated south side of St. Louis. The park's rolling hills, dotted with trees, although not conducive for active recreation, make ideal locations for passive recreation opportunities like picnicking, sunbathing, and walking. The open, flat, lawn covered areas are generally where the active recreation, like tennis, soft ball and soccer take place.

Other park recreation amenities include a playground, walking paths, racquet and handball courts, a lily pond, two restroom facilities and a park structure that is utilized for storage and utility connection.

LANDSCAPE

Diversity of canopy trees, providing shade, is great in Francis Park. Large groupings of single species of trees are clustered sporadically throughout the park. These groves include pine, persimmon, american smoke tree, maple and oak. The major north-south pathway through the park is lined with a healthy and stately allee of bald cypress trees, all in the range of 24" in diameter. Understory and ground plane diversity is limited to a few species of flowering trees, minimal shrubs and perennial massings, and huge expanses of lawn. A historic, woodland garden, near the north east corner provides horticultural diversity and is a beloved feature in the park.

Per the 2001 survey the park contains approximately 874 trees of around 50 varieties. 80% of those trees are in good to excellent condition.

OVERALL TREE CONDITION

Condition Rating	Frequency	Percent
Dead (0)	17	2%
Poor (<40)	31	4%
Fair (40-55)	120	14%
Good (60-75)	628	72%
Excellent (80-90)	78	9%
Total	874	

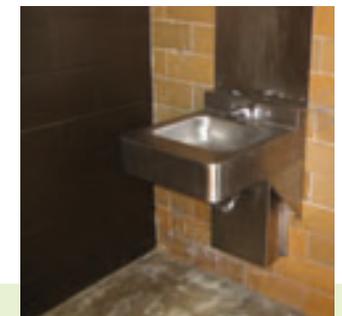
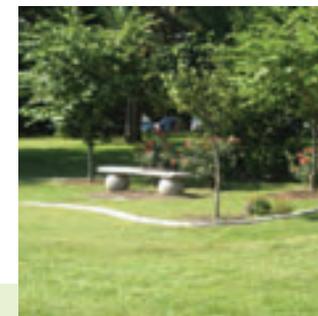
INFRASTRUCTURE

The infrastructure of Francis Park has performed for many years with satisfactory service. In particular, the sewers, utilities and pathways have been the backbone to the park's amenities that attract various user groups. Some of the infrastructure was built as early as 1935 as funds were available to provide athletic fields, tennis courts, walkways, picnic grounds and much of the landscaping. Over the years much of the infrastructure has been subject to disrepair. The park's infrastructure is in need of significant improvement to bring it up to modern standards for safety, functionality and aesthetics.

Most of the park's inlets, manholes, and underground sewer pipes are in immediate need of cleaning/repair or replacement. Currently, the majority of the park's storm water is captured with a system of inlets and grates and piped to an existing 16' horseshoe sewer pipe that extends through the center of the park, from Nottingham Avenue to the north, to Eichelberger Avenue on the south. This pipe is a major collector of the area for the city's combined storm and sanitary sewer. During peak storm events, surcharged conditions from the combined 16' sewer have the potential to overflow and pond in the park. These events frequently occur and render portions of the park useless after storm events. These surcharged overflows are potentially hazardous and create unhealthy situations for park visitors and wildlife.

Utilities in the park are also outdated and in need of an upgrade. Large community wide events draw from the park's limited supply systems for electricity and water. Connection to these utilities is limited and can make logistics of park wide events challenging.

Existing sidewalks throughout the park are in fair condition despite a few path deficiencies including minor settling, poor drainage and cracking. Some areas of settlement are impassable after major storm events. Sidewalks, although not designed for auto circulation, are utilized as roadways when community wide events are taking place. The major north-south walkways in the park could be made more accessible for all park users, especially those with limited mobility.



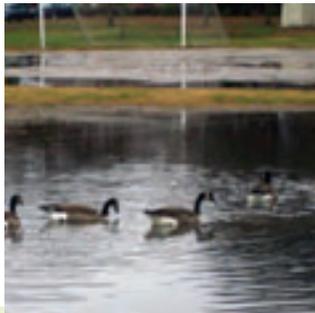


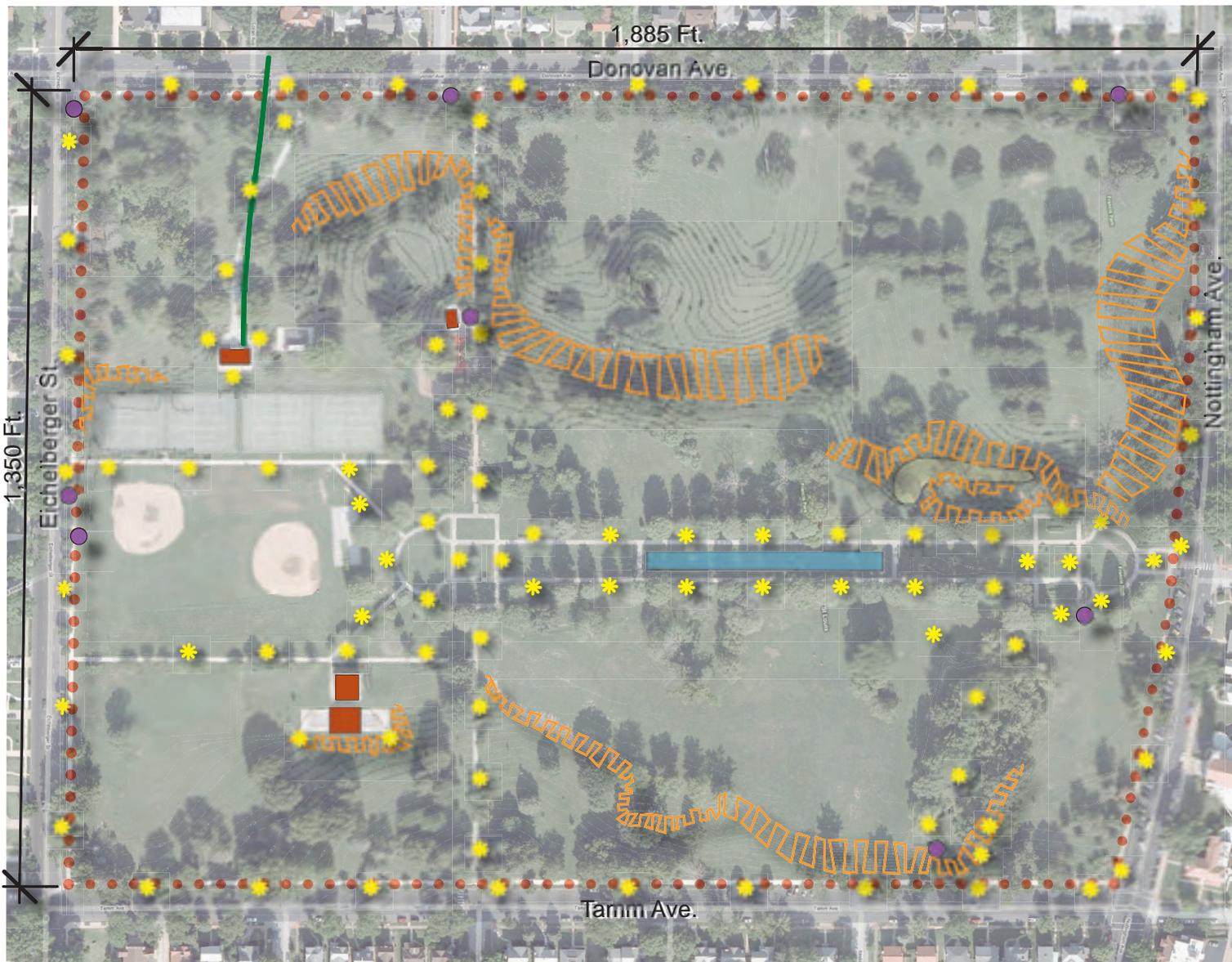
PARK TOPOGRAPHY AND HYDROLOGY

The perimeter of the 60 acre park is consistently at street level with most of the amenities centered in the park, in a valley type setting. The highest point in elevation, approximately 474.0, is located at the corner of Donovan Avenue and Nottingham Avenue. The lowest point in elevation, approximately 442.75, is located near the south end of the park, adjacent to Eichelberger Avenue. This area, along with two other nearby low points, collects and holds storm water in large rain events. The additional low points are just east of Donovan Avenue. One of these spots has been identified as a functioning sinkhole. The other is a depression that collects water and allows percolation into the soil. While the eastern and southern ends of the park contain expanses of flat land for active recreation amenities, the western side of the park is characterized with small, rolling hills, prohibiting these types of amenities but providing ample opportunity for passive recreation.



A natural spring occurs at the northeast corner of the park. This spring once fed a small creek that ran the entire length of Francis Park. Over time, the creek was engineered and piped to maximize lawn area. This act eliminated natural habitat and altered natural drainage patterns. Only two small remnants of the creek remain.





Legend

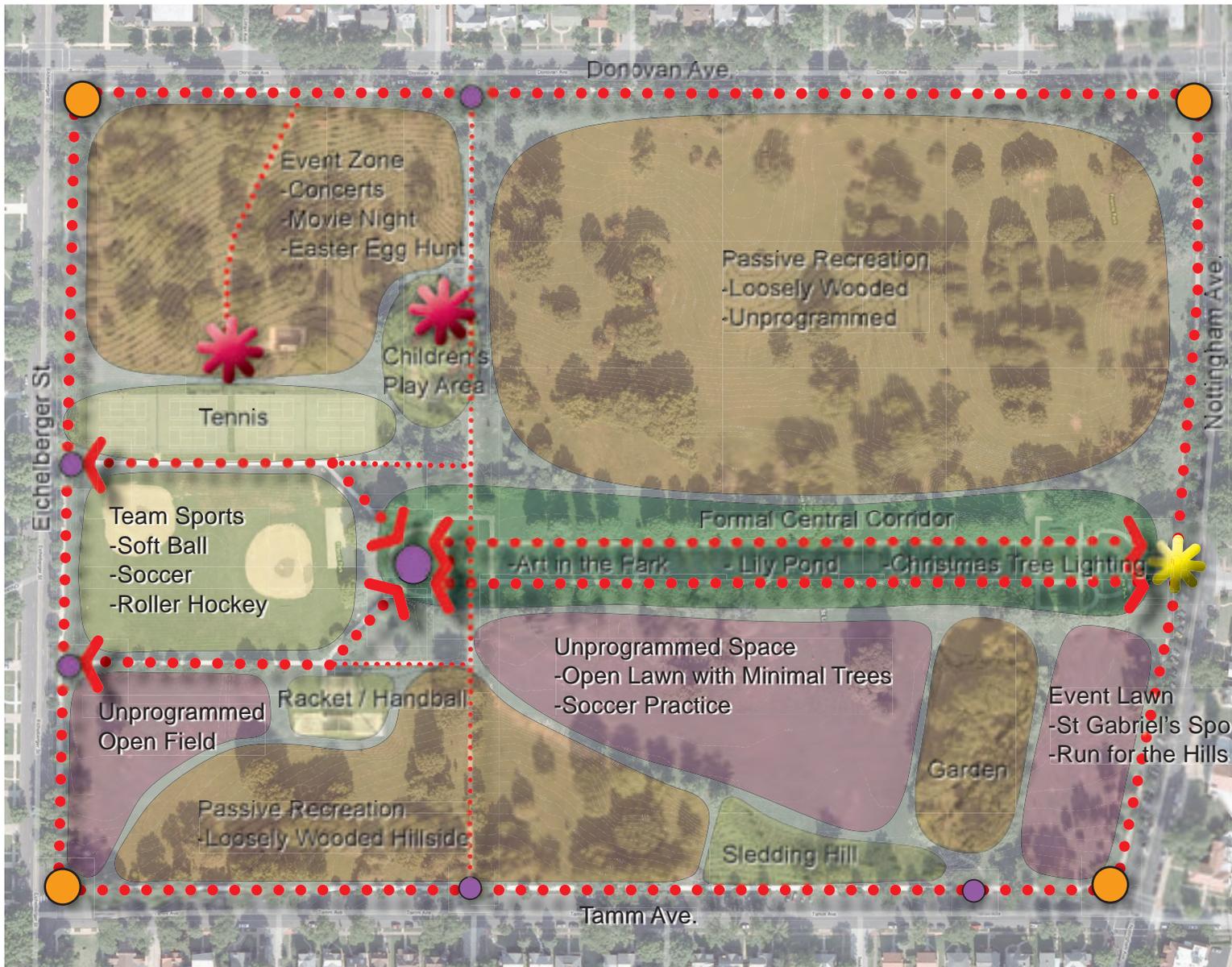
- Perimeter Sidewalk
- Gas Lines
- ★ Lighting
- Water Valves
- Lily Pool
- Existing Structures
- ▨ Slopes Greater Than 20%

Perimeter Walk = 1.2 Miles

Total Park Acreage =
Approximately 58 Acres



EXISTING CONDITIONS



- Legend**
- Main Circulation
 - ⋯ Secondary Circulation
 - ☀ Main Park Entrance
 - ✿ Restrooms
 - Identification Node
 - Pedestrian Nodes

EXISTING SITE USES

PARK USES

The park is used daily for typical passive and active recreation but it is also heavily used for community wide events. These events are important community building efforts for average park users, neighborhood residents and the city at large.

Throughout the summer the Compton Heights Concert Band performs regularly and movie nights are held in the park. Annually there is an Easter egg hunt and a Christmas tree lighting celebration. Sporting event fund raisers, the Gateway Cup Bike Race and the Run for the Hills are held annually in and around the park. Each year the park also provides the back drop for a car show and an art show, Art in the Park. Finally, there are yearly civil war reenactments and volunteer work days. All of these activities require infrastructure and utility coordination. They draw hundreds of users to the park and are much loved community wide events.

STRUCTURES

A visual inventory and assessment was completed on the existing conditions of all park structures to determine possible improvements and provide a basic understanding of issues that could affect opinions of probable cost. The inventory can be found in the appendix of this report.

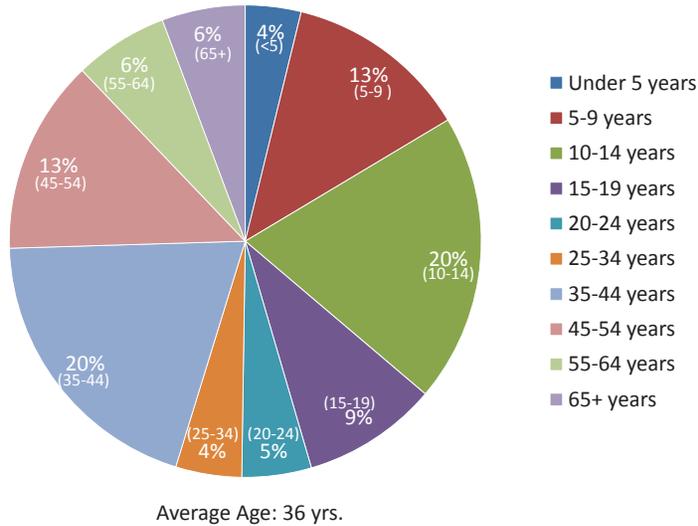
PARK MEMORIALS

Several memorials to area residents exist within the park. These memorials are important parts of the park and should be maintained in their current locations.

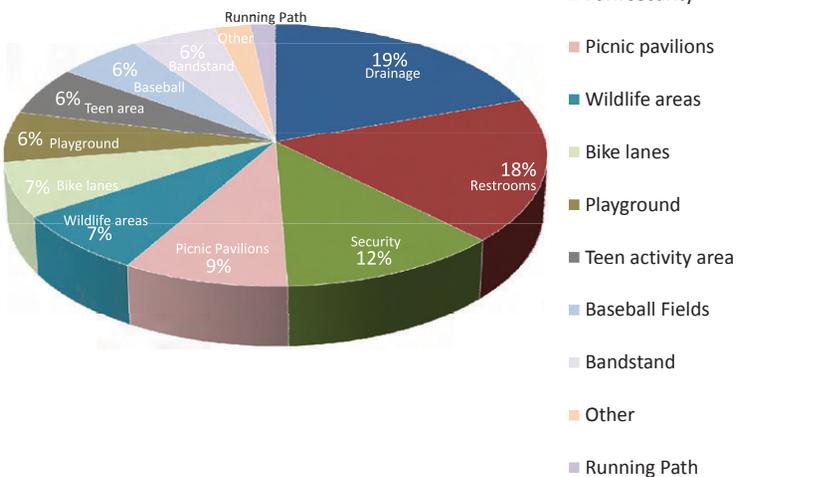


SURVEY RESULTS

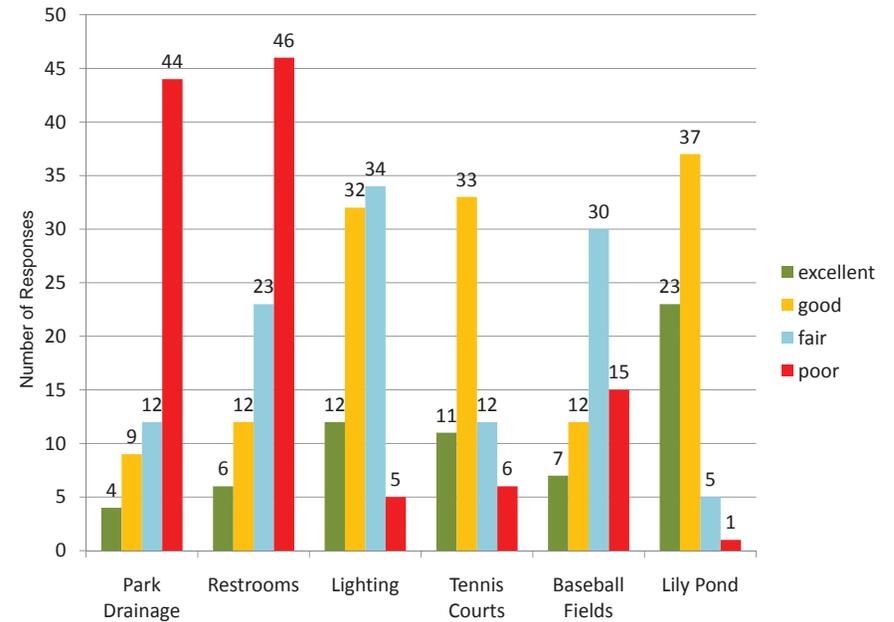
Age Range of Park Users



Desired Park Improvements



Condition of Park Amenities



Total Respondents = 129