



November 28, 2012

To Residents of Pottawattamie County:

In 2011, the Iowa West Foundation commissioned two county-wide needs assessments: one on Youth Development, and the other on Parks, Recreation and Related Leisure Facilities. Links to both of these completed studies are found on Iowa West's home page at www.iowawestfoundation.org. I hope you find them both interesting and useful.

At the Foundation's request, the authors of the Recreation Assessment are careful to note that this is not a conventional *master plan*; rather, it is a broad inquiry whose findings and recommendations will inform all those contemplating investments in recreational facilities and programming in Pottawattamie County. Extensive public input is described (Chapter 1, page 8) and documented (Chapter 5, pages 69 – 98).

Please note that Iowa West Foundation anticipates developing a new strategic plan during the first six months of 2013; while this study will surely inform the Foundation's long-term planning, one should not automatically assume that *parks, recreation and related leisure facilities and programming* will be accorded a specific priority in our next three to five-year strategic plan.

Iowa West Foundation has distributed the report in digital format to our local advisory committee, city halls in Pottawattamie County, the chair of the County Board of Supervisors, the Pottawattamie County Conservation Board, and Pottawattamie County libraries.

With regard to existing park, recreation and leisure facilities, these are the essential findings:

1. Parks in Council Bluffs/Carter Lake are well maintained and generally well distributed; however, not all residents are within walking distance of a park, and the northeast quadrant of Council Bluffs lacks a community park.
2. Residents in small towns and rural areas are generally well served by neighborhood parks, but many of the facilities in these parks need to be upgraded. There is also a need for community parks and sports facilities in some of the smaller communities in the county.
3. There are only five outdoor pools/aquatic areas in the county, resulting in a shortage of water-based recreation.

4. Trails are found in Council Bluffs or in the county's large nature-based parks. The trails were the highest rated recreation amenity by the public. Other than the Wabash Trace Trail, there are no regional trails connecting communities and only small isolated trail segments in the cities and towns outside of Council Bluffs. Even within Council Bluffs, there are still a number of important missing trail linkages.
5. Natural areas protect many of the county's most sensitive habitats. These are typically open to the public and offer recreation facilities where public use is appropriate.
6. Education facilities are generally supported by adequate recreation amenities but access is often limited to school-based activities.

With regard to current indoor facilities and recreation programs, these are the essential findings:

1. There is a lack of indoor recreation facilities in the Council Bluffs area and consequently shortfalls in some recreation programs typically offered by other communities its size.
2. The nonprofit sector fills a critical role but is limited by undersized facilities.
3. There are only five indoor aquatic centers in the county and two of these are school facilities with restrictions on public use.
4. Recreation programming outside of the southwest quadrant of the county is limited due to a shortage of facilities.
5. Residents in the eastern third of the county often travel to adjacent counties for indoor recreation facilities and programs.

In addition to the findings above, the consultants proposed and Iowa West Foundation Board approved the following enhancements to our funding guidelines and procedures on October 16, 2012:

Economic Sustainability

Applicants proposing major facilities will submit maintenance and long-term operations plans demonstrating that facility upkeep and staffing can be paid for by user fees or that the managing entity has allocated resources to subsidize these costs on an ongoing basis without significant support from Iowa West Foundation.

Major facilities with high construction and operating costs will be regional (serving several communities or a population base of approximately 3,000 residents) in order to be sustainable.

Public Access

The Foundation has a special interest in funding projects and facilities that are open to the general public, or at minimum, open to the public during non-working hours (after 3:00 p.m. and on weekends).

Partnering

The Foundation anticipates cooperation and collaboration between agencies and communities in order to foster facilities providing the greatest benefit for the community at the lowest cost; and sharing the burden of planning, construction and operation.

Recreation Equity for Park, Recreation, and Leisure Facilities

The Foundation favors an equitable distribution of park, recreation, and leisure facilities and programs throughout Pottawattamie County.

The Foundation supports providing basic park amenities within walking distance of the majority (at least 80%) of residents in a city or town. Basic park amenities typically include a small area of grass for turf-based recreation, a picnic shelter, and a small playground.

Universal Access and Safety

Public recreation facilities that are constructed with Foundation funding are strongly encouraged to meet the minimum requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

The Foundation supports bringing existing park and recreation facilities into compliance with current safety standards and to encourage design of new facilities to meet or exceed those standards.

Recreation Facilities and Programs for Youth

The Foundation places a priority on promoting youth-based facilities and recreation programs.

Ongoing Maintenance

Ongoing maintenance should be the responsibility of the facility owner/operator and not the Iowa West Foundation.

Thank you once again. Please contact us with questions or comments on this study or any of the work of the Iowa West Foundation.

Sincerely,



Pete Tulipana, MPA
President and CEO