

This report was developed to provide a limited update to the 1980 Action Plan developed for the East St. Louis Park District. This report is not designed or meant to replace the existing 1980 report. Instead, this report will focus on updating population information, demographics, East St. Louis Park district equipment and current renovations. An updated plan will help the park district and city officials determine the needs of East St. Louis communities and recreation plans for the future.

A Changing Population and Economy

The City of East St. Louis is located in the northwest corner of St. Clair County, Illinois. The larger City of St. Louis, Missouri is directly across the Mississippi River. The City of East St. Louis has had a rapidly declining population for several decades, which reflects an array of problems. In 1970, the census reported 69,996 people residing in East St. Louis. In 2000, the census reported that 31,542 were living in East St. Louis. The size of this population has dropped by over 50% in the last thirty years. A continuing effect on the changes in East St. Louis economy are a result of a declining population and a declining workforce and vice versa (see appendix A). In the last thirty years East St. Louis has lost 55% of its population and the labor force has declined by 30% since 1980. In recent years, the unemployment rate has been greatly reduced. 1980, 21% of the population was unemployed; in 1990 14.5% of the population was unemployed. In 1997 only 9% of the population was unemployed. However despite being employed, many families have very low income and a high percent of East St. Louis have a low to moderate income. The median family income in 1980 was \$9,452 and in 1990 \$12,627. Current estimates are unavailable.

Racial and age demographics of the city are also changing. There is a decline in the percentage of people eighteen years and younger who reside in East St. Louis. Few people are starting families in East St. Louis and many are moving from the area. This decline in children in the area could mean the population will begin to die off as fewer and fewer children are a part of the population. New families will need to move into East St. Louis in order to help the population in the city remain constant or increase. Additionally, an increasing adult and elderly population means that parks and recreation will need ways to meet the needs of these groups. If money is unavailable to offer programming for these groups then perhaps more general facilities that everyone can enjoy should be developed such as flower beds in the neighborhoods. Furthermore, there has been a dramatic change in the race demographics of the city. In 1970, the population was 69% black; in 2000 the population was 98% black; this is a ratio that is virtually unmatched anywhere else in the nation. The census data for 2000 shows a tiny decline in the total percent of blacks in the population compared to 1990 census data. However, this small change can be attributed to the development of a small population of other minority groups. If the City of East St. Louis is able to attract larger populations of these other minority groups, the total population may increase.

Current indications in population and economic figures seem to indicate that after many years of population decline and high unemployment. The unemployment rate is extremely low; it was recorded at 9% in 1997 and current estimates indicate that it is even lower today. Furthermore, with more individuals working the median family income is on the rise; the median family income increased by over 30% between 1980 and 1990. For incomes by census tract consult Appendix B. As the population numbers begin to stabilize it appears that the flight from East St. Louis may be declining. Residents who have chosen to stay in East St. Louis are likely to be individuals who are committed to the community and their neighborhoods. People who possess strong levels of interest in the community most often are committed to maintaining and improving the general condition of the neighborhood, including maintaining and improving the general condition of neighborhood parks. Examples of this dedication can be seen in several small groups throughout the East St. Louis community. Neighbors have joined together to develop mini-parks and help to maintain and beautify the condition of existing parks such as Virginia Park. The development and survival of these small neighborhood groups will be critical in generating support for local parks.

The Parks and Recreation System

East St. Louis is a low-income city with well dispersed recreational facilities. A majority of these facilities need repair or renovations. Every neighborhood is impacted by the needs of the parks and recreation system. Due to continuing cutbacks there is virtually no recreational program funding available. Therefore, the park district is unable to offer programs or activities to the community. Additionally, there is no formal linkage between the park district and the other major government bodies such as the Housing Authority or School District 189. It is generally agreed upon that the city's parks serve solely the residents of East St. Louis and are not used by non-residents. Since the parks are used solely by East St. Louis residents the parks are unable to gain additional income from non-residents.

A proposed merger of the City and the East St. Louis Park District in the early 1980s never came about and the park district continues to be a separate entity of the government. The park district faces continual budget cutbacks, and presently has little more than a \$250,000 annual budget. Other towns with similar populations in Illinois have budgets (**indicate range and cite info**). The financial constraints of the East St. Louis Park District will make it difficult, if not impossible to address many, if any, of the various facility needs without a sound tax base. The current budget of the park district barely covers salaries for an extremely small staff and basic maintenance and operations expenses, such as lighting and grounds maintenance. Therefore, there is not money for repairs, renovations, or equipment purchases.

As long as the current financial situation continues the park district will have to rely upon grants and other financial gifts in order to make any substantial improvements to the facilities. However, state and federal grants may prove difficult for the park district to obtain due to the fact that most grants are based on a 50-50 matching system. The park district does not have 50% of the needed funds to match to potential grant money.

Many recreational facilities have closed since the 1980 Report (see Appendix G) and the condition of other recreation facilities has significantly changed since 1980 (see Appendix I). Despite this East St. Louis does have an appropriate amount of recreational space for its population. Overall there are approximately 301.4 acres of recreational space. Which is about 104 people for every acre of land. If the Frank Holten State Park acres are included there are less than 25 people per acre. The standard set by the National Park and Recreation Association is 1000 people for every 10 acres. East St. Louis either meets those standards or is well below, depending on whether Frank Holten State Park is included in analysis of the city's recreational space. However, many of these facilities are in fair to poor condition. Additionally, the type of equipment that the park district has available is not very diversified (Appendix H). The city has several baseball fields, playgrounds, and tennis courts, but a limited amount of other recreational equipment. This report has divided the city into four areas: north central, south central, east, and south east. Population and recreation assessments for each census tract are shown in Appendices C and D.

North Central

The North Central planning unit is the area of the city which is located east of the riverfront, west of the Southern Railway and north of State Street and Illinois Avenue. Approximately 4,964 low-income people live in this area. The amount of people is fairly evenly split between all three tracts. The area has a slightly higher proportion of people under the age of 18, especially tract 5044, the Calvert Park area.

The North Central area has the highest percentage of people per recreational acre in the city. All of the recreational facilities in this area are less than 3 acres in size. There are 320 people for every recreational acre. This area suffered the largest amount of recreational spaces closed since the 1980 assessment. Most of the schools in this area have been closed, thus leading to a major decline in the amount of recreation space in the area. The active play space in this area is extremely limited. The active play space is mostly limited to a couple of basketball courts and several playgrounds. Larger recreational spaces in this area such as a football field are almost non-existent in this area. However, a group has received money to renovate Parson's Field, which held a football field and running track.

South Central

The South Central planning area is south of North Central area, with State Street/Illinois Street forming its northern boundary and 10th/9th/8th streets forming its western boundary. This area has the largest population of any of the planning areas, 13,073 low-income residents. This area has a higher than average population of 60 and older.

The South Central area also has a high percentage of people to recreational acre. There are 245 people for every acre of recreational space. Two of the city's larger parks are located in this area, Lincoln and Virginia Parks. Lincoln Park is said to be the city's busiest park. However, it is interesting to note that there are rumors to build a new elementary school in Lincoln Park. This development would significantly diminish the amount of functional recreation space at the park, therefore diminishing the significance of this resource for neighboring communities and the city as a whole.

East

The East planning unit is the area of the city located east of the Southern Railroad, west of Thirty-seventh Street and north of Illinois Avenue. This area has almost as many residents as the South Central area; there are 12,681 low and moderate income people in this area. Tracts 5005 and 5012 have slightly higher average household incomes than other tracts in the city. Tract 5005 has a mean household income of \$25,980 and tract 5010 has a mean income of \$25,346 (Appendix 2).

This planning unit has the lowest ratio of people to recreational acres. There are 75 people to every acre of land in this planning unit. Jones Park is 130 acre facility and the largest in the city with the exception of Frank Holten State Park. This planning unit offers a wide variety of recreational facilities, including the new Jackie Joyner-Kersey Center. This center which recently opened serves as a recreational outlet for children. The Jackie Joyner-Kersey Center was developed as an afterschool recreational center for children. The center tries to attract students to participate in activities at the center instead of hanging out on the streets. Another phase of development for this center is said to be in progress. The addition will include an Olympic size indoor swimming pool among other equipment.

South East

The South East planning unit of East St. Louis is the portion of the city which is located east of the Thirty-seventh Street and South of Louisville and Nashville Railroad. The size of the population in this area has not changed greatly in the last twenty years, although there have been changes in demographics of the population. These census tracts were predominantly white neighborhoods. In 1970, tracts 5014 and 5015.01 had black populations of 1% or less. Information gathered from 1990 census data indicates that tract 5015.01 has an 87% black population; both tracts 5013 and 5014 have black populations above 95%. This

area also has significantly higher income levels than the other tracts in East St. Louis. Tract 5013 has a mean household income of \$24,565; tract 5014 has a mean household income of \$29,819. Census tract 5015.01 is drastically higher than any other tract, with a mean income of \$56,447.

Several of the recreational facilities in this area have closed. Yet, this area still has one of the lower ratios of people to recreational acre. There are 163 people for every recreational acre in this area. Several of the facilities in this area have larger facility areas than most recreational facilities in East St. Louis.

Funded Rehabilitation Projects

The rehabilitation needs of the East St. Louis parks and recreation system are overwhelming. Almost every neighborhood in the city has park and recreational facilities that need renovation or repair. Very few parks are not in need of at least minor repairs or renovation. However, most parks have at least a minimal level of functionality.

Several grants have been received in the last twenty years for various projects in East St. Louis park and recreation facilities. However there are still many park and recreational needs in the city. Some smaller grants to renovate Parson's Field and make some repairs at Virginia Park have been received (see appendix F). This money is just the beginning of funding needed to completely repair and renovate the city's parks when compared to other cities in Illinois with a tradition of strong park districts.

Inventory of Remaining Rehabilitation Needs

To have a complete assessment of the rehabilitation needs of the City of East St. Louis visits should be made to all of the city's park and recreational facilities, including the schools, public facilities and assessments of the condition of the equipment were made, in addition a list of specific kinds of repairs/renovations needed by each facility were noted.

Many of the problems cited at the different parks are very similar. As noted in the 1980 report, the city's softball and baseball fields are greatly in need of repair and little has happened since then. In addition, many of the playground facilities have unsafe equipment that needs to be replaced.

The list of needed repair and renovation is extensive and includes every park owned by the East St. Louis Park District. Repairs and renovations range from larger repairs like new playground equipment and resurfacing baseball fields to smaller needs like broken park benches and picnic areas. The problem lies in where to begin and where funding for the projects would come from. Here is a list of the Park District's facilities cited in poor condition:

New Facilities

A few new facilities have been developed for the East St. Louis community. The Jackie Joyner-Kersey Center opened in Spring 2000. This facility is an indoor recreational outlet for children. The opening is said to have only completed stage one. Stage two, which is said to include a 50 meter indoor swimming pool is suppose to follow shortly.

A new public library is being built and should be opening sometime during 2001. The new library will replace the current library located in the North Central area. Lastly, in a recent press release (12.16.00) Illinois Governor, George Ryan, made a commitment to open 7 new schools in East St. Louis. Presumably, these new school facilities, when built, should provide additional recreational facilities to the community.

Demands/Needs of East St. Louis

The population size of the city of East St. Louis has declined significantly in the last twenty years. Also, the demographics of the city have changed as shown in Appendix A. The percentage of elderly residents has stayed somewhat constant. The amount of children enrolled in school dropped dramatically between 1980 and 1990, but seems to have stayed fairly consistent since then.

Recent economic developments and initiatives are beginning to be reflected in the community. The population size appears to be holding steady and the household incomes have slightly increased as unemployment declines; some census tract household incomes are in the moderate bracket.

New developments such as the Jackie Joyner-Kersey Center, new public library, new rail system, and promised school developments are significant elements in the revitalization of this community. Current recreational land space is adequate for a community of this size, but facility conditions need improvement. Particular attention should be devoted to athletic fields, including football, baseball, and soccer. The city has a very low number of football fields, soccer fields, and every baseball and softball field maintained by the park district is in need of repair.

Additionally, since there are many school aged children in this community efforts should be made to improve and replace broken and unsafe playground equipment. Many parks had equipment that will not meet current safety standards.

Ideally, additional programming for both children and the elderly is desirable. Together these two populations make up 50% of residents in the community. Currently the park district does not have the resources to provide such opportunities. Continued partnerships with the neighborhood schools, local organizations, and faith-based groups to develop programming at the recreational facilities are needed.

Limitations of this Report:

It is important to note that there are several limitations to this report. This report has focused primarily on East St. Louis Park District Facilities. While the report has included an updated list of closed school facilities and current school facilities on-site visits were not made to these facilities for current inventory assessments. It has been assumed that recreational acreage at school facilities has not changed since the 1980 assessment. Changes in facility conditions or renovations to existing equipment may have been made at the school facilities. These potential renovations/alterations are not cited in this report. Furthermore, inventory assessments have not been conducted at other locations in the city, including public housing recreational facilities and public facilities. Additional information about the park district and an assessment of community members recreational interests would be beneficial contributions to this report.