

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.