

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.