

# WASHOE COUNTY HEALTH DISTRICT

ENHANCING QUALITY OF LIFE

## Healthy Parks 89431 Project

Chronic Disease Prevention Program

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**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

## Table of Contents

A. Project Description .....	3
B. Data Collection.....	3
Audits.....	4
Surveys .....	4
Counts .....	4
C. Quantitative Data Findings .....	4
Park Utilization.....	4
Table 1. Park Utilization Based On Time .....	5
Signage & Transportation.....	5
Table 2. Percentage of Park Sections with Information Attributes .....	6
Table 3. Percentage of Park Sections with Transportation Attributes .....	6
Sporting Assets.....	6
Table 4. Sporting Assets in 89431 Zip Code.....	7
Public Facility Assets .....	7
Table 5. Public Facility Assets .....	8
Perceived Safety.....	8
Table 6. Perceived Safety Attributes .....	8
Park Utilization Variables.....	9
D. Surveys.....	9
Figure 1. Survey Respondents and Non-respondents by Gender.....	9
Figure 2. Survey Respondents and Non-respondents by Race.....	10
Figure 3. Frequency of Park Visitation by Survey Respondents.....	10
Qualitative Responses from Surveys .....	11
E. Conclusion.....	11
F. Recommendations.....	12
Programmatic Efforts .....	12

## **A. Project Description**

A central goal of the Washoe County Chronic Disease Prevention Program is to increase physical activity to reduce the overall chronic disease burden in Washoe County. Focusing on local urban parks and open spaces has been shown to increase community physical activity levels.<sup>1</sup> In 2017, the Washoe County Health District (WCHD) conducted a [Healthy Parks Survey Pilot Project](#) in the 89502 zip code. The assessment found that parks and open spaces are currently underutilized in our highest risk communities. In addition, recommendations from the final report of the 2017 Healthy Parks Pilot Project included conducting similar studies on parks throughout Washoe County to determine specific barriers, needs, or incentives for local residents to increase utilization of parks and increase overall physical activity. With the success of the pilot project, the decision was made to assess parks located in the City of Sparks to increase physical activity through the promotion of using existing infrastructure in high-risk neighborhoods.

The 89431 zip code was chosen for the project based on findings from the 2018-2020 Washoe County Health Needs Assessment. This assessment found the 89431 zip code to have a high Community Needs Index (CNI) score. Communities with high CNI scores have elevated mortality rates and increased disease burden for chronic disease such as hypertension and stroke – burdens that can be reduced with increased physical activity.

Grant funding supported this project, allowing staff to conduct eight park assessments. Neighborhood parks were chosen in the 89431 zip code to have comparable data for the report. The data collection for this project was modeled from the pilot project conducted in 2017 for comparability of parks in Washoe County. Data for this project was collected from the end of March 2018 to the end of May 2018 by Washoe County Health District staff. To date, this will be the second set of data collected on Washoe County parks.

## **B. Data Collection**

Data collection comprised of three parts: 1) park utilization counts, 2) qualitative surveys of park attendees, and 3) park audits. Data was categorized based on the day and time it was collected to capture usage among different populations, to identify any trends (e.g. park utilization being higher on certain days and at certain times), as well as having the opportunity to survey new people. Park visitations consisted of a weekday visit (Monday through Friday, 8am to 5pm), an evening visit (Monday through Friday, 5pm to 7pm), and a weekend visit (Saturday through Sunday, 8am to 5pm). It is important to note that some park visitations occurred during Washoe County School District's spring break, which could have affected

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<sup>1</sup> Center for Disease Control.(2011). The CDC Guide to Strategies to Increase Physical Activity in the Community. Accessed July 2018 from: [https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/downloads/PA\\_2011\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/downloads/PA_2011_WEB.pdf).

utilization numbers. In addition, parks were visited in a variety of weather conditions which was accounted for on each park audit.

### Audits

The audit included 71 questions, highlighting various aspects of the parks. The audit included sections about park signage, parking information, biking information, condition of playground equipment, condition of activity areas, park quality, dogs in parks, and park aesthetics. The purpose of the park audit was to identify both negative and positive attributes of a park to see if certain factors influenced park utilization. On average, it took 40 minutes to complete each park audit.

### Surveys

There were two different surveys conducted. One survey was for park attendees who were interviewed. The other survey was for individuals who did not want to be interviewed. If a person was under the age of 18, they were not interviewed unless a responsible adult gave them permission to be surveyed. For park attendees who were interviewed, the survey consisted of a variety of questions regarding transportation to the park, how often they utilize the park, what activities they engage in while at the park, and their likes and dislikes about the perspective park. In addition to these questions, demographic information was also collected including their sex, race/ethnicity and year of birth. A total of 14 surveys were completed among respondents.

The non-respondent survey included information about the person's sex, apparent race/ethnicity, physical limitations, and if the person was with a dog, on a bike, or in a group. Staff completed this survey if a person declined our invitation to be interviewed. There were a total of 18 non-respondent surveys completed during the course of this project. Data was collected for both participant and non-participants to see if there was a difference between those who agreed to be surveyed versus those who declined.

### Counts

Park utilization counts were conducted to track the amount of people who were at the park during the audit. A total of 24 counts were completed. After each count was completed a brief description regarding the type of people in the park (e.g. mostly adult males, families with small kids, a mix, etc.), and the location of park attendees was recorded.

## **C. Quantitative Data Findings**

### Park Utilization

Overall, park utilization was highest during the weekdays between 8am and 5pm as seen in Table 1. During the weekday counts Ardmore Park had the highest

utilization. During the evening counts Aimone Park had the highest utilization, and during the weekend Deer Park had the highest park count.

Table 1. Park Utilization Based On Time

Park	Weekday Count	Evening Count	Weekend Count
Aimone Park	11	11	4
Ardmore Park	30	2	5
Church Park	1	0	0
Deer Park	9	3	13
Longford Park	0	5	7
Oppio Park	0	0	4
Poulakidas Park	9	0	0
Village Green Park	10	2	2
<b>Average</b>	<b>8.75</b>	<b>2.88</b>	<b>4.38</b>

Table 1 represents the amount of people at each park during a weekday (Monday-Friday 8am-5pm), evening (Monday-Friday 5pm-7pm), and weekend (Saturday-Sunday 8am-5pm) park count. Each park was visited three times, and a headcount was taken each time. On average, nine people utilized the parks during the weekdays, three people utilized the parks during the evening, and about four people utilized the parks on the weekend.

### Signage & Transportation

Analysis of park signage included observing what types of signs were at the parks and the type of information that was included on the signs. The majority of parks had signage that included the park name and park/facility information (e.g. no alcohol, no sleeping in the park). Only 50% of parks had the park hours posted. In addition, none of the parks had event information available or distance/mileage markers. Increasing access to this information is important because hosting events at parks, and including park maps and distance/mileage marker signs are shown to increase walkability and park utilization.<sup>2</sup>

There are improvements that can be made regarding transportation to these parks. Out of the 14 survey respondents, eight individuals drove their personal car to the park, which was the most popular mode of transportation to the parks. The

<sup>2</sup> Kaczynski, Andrew T., et al. "Association of Park Size, Distance, and Features With Physical Activity in Neighborhood Parks." *Advances in Pediatrics.*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, Aug. 2008. Accessed July 2018 from: [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2446450/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2446450/).

remaining six survey respondents walked to the park. No survey respondents used public transportation (e.g. rode the bus) or rode their bike to the park. This could be due to the low proportion of bus stops, bike racks, and bike lanes. Only 13% of parks had a bus stop that was accessible and in sight from the parks. Also, only 13% of parks had bike racks. However, all of the bike racks were mostly empty during the park visits. In addition, out of the eight parks none of them had nearby bike lanes or share the road signs. Having no physical distinction for cars and bikes on the road could deter individuals from riding their bike to the park because of safety concerns.

Table 2. Percentage of Park Sections with Information Attributes

Information Attributes	
Contact Information	0%
Distance Markers	0%
Educational Signs	25%
Event Information	0%
Facility Information	63%
General Information	88%
Park Hours	50%
Park Maps	0%
Park Rules	50%

*Table 2 includes information about park signage. None of the parks had signage that included contact information, distance markers, park maps, or event information.*

Table 3. Percentage of Park Sections with Transportation Attributes

Transportation Attributes	
Bike Lanes	0%
Bike Racks	13%
Bus Stop	13%
Marked Bike Lanes	0%
Share the Road Sign	0%
Sidewalks	100%

*Table 3 includes information about transportation attributes. All of the parks had sidewalks. However, none of the parks had bike lanes or marked bike lanes surrounding the park. Marked bike lanes refer to roads surrounding the park that are maintained through road labels and signage. Existing bike lanes that were not maintained or labeled with signage were categorized as bike lanes.*

### Sporting Assets

The eight neighborhood parks that were audited in the 89431 zip code provided large lawn areas. However, these open grass areas were not frequently used when staff visited the parks. The numbers of specific functional areas (e.g. Skate Park,

volleyball courts) at these parks were limited. Table 3 shows a list of sporting assets, most of which were shown to be in good condition when audited. Some additional sporting assets that are worthy of mention is the horseshoe area at Aimone Park, the community pool at Deer Park and the handball court at Poulakidas Park.

Table 4. Sporting Assets in 89431 Zip Code

Sporting Assets	No.
Baseball Field	1
Basketball Courts	4
Fitness Stations	1
Lawn	8
Skate Park	0
Tennis	3
Volleyball	0

*Table 4 displays the number of sporting assets among the eight parks. Out of the eight parks surveyed basketball courts were the most popular asset. None of the parks had volleyball courts, or a skate park. It is important to note that all of the parks had an open grass area.*

#### Public Facility Assets

Public facility assets include public restrooms, toilets, picnic tables, and water fountains. When facility assets are kept in good and working condition this can potentially attract community members to use their neighborhood parks more often, and remain at the park for extended periods of time. When comparing public facility assets among the eight parks, benches and picnic tables were more prevalent compared to public restrooms or drinking fountains. A reason for this could be the increased cost and maintenance. For the parks that had restrooms and water fountains not all of them were accessible and/or working. According to table 4, restrooms and drinking fountains rated as having a lower average condition score (one being the best score, zero being the worst) when compared to the other public facility assets.

Shade coverage was another factor taken into consideration when assessing park quality. Five out of the eight parks were rated as having 25% shade coverage available. Two out of the eight parks had less than 25% shade coverage available and only one out of the eight parks was rated as having most of the park covered by shade. Providing more shaded areas could possibly incentivize local residents to increase park utilization and increase overall physical activity.

Table 5. Public Facility Assets

Public Facilities	Percentage	Avg. Condition Score
Benches	75%	1.0
Drinking Fountain	13%	0.0
Picnic Tables	88%	0.7
Toilet	25%	0.5
Trash Cans	88%	NA

Table 5 displays the public facility assets at the parks. Only one park had a drinking fountain and only two parks had a toilet. The drinking fountain was rated as having an average condition score of zero, due to it not working during the three visits to the park. The benches were rated as having a perfect average condition score of one because all of the benches in the eight parks were in good condition during the time they were assessed.

### Perceived Safety

One of the main attributes that can affect park utilization is perceived safety. Aspects that influence perceived safety include parks with limited access, a higher number of adult males, gang presence, vandalism, graffiti, litter, and worn equipment. All of these factors contribute to how safe someone feels using a park. A combination of these variables can deter community members from using their neighborhood parks. However, graffiti, vandalism, and excessive litter were not observed at most parks in the 89431 zip code. On the contrary, landscaping was also assessed to see if this feature contributed to one's utilization of parks, even though it is a positive factor instead of a negative one.

Table 6. Perceived Safety Attributes

Features	Percentage
Excessive litter	0%
Fixed graffiti	0%
Graffiti	25%
Landscaping	88%
Threatening persons	0%
Transients	38%
Vandalism	0%

Table 6 includes visual observation of factors that could affect one's perception of safety. However, there was no vandalism, excessive litter, or threatening persons observed during the visits to each park. The number of transients seen at each park was fairly low, except for Deer Park in particular where transients were seen at each audit.



### Park Utilization Variables

To increase the use of neighborhood parks, focusing more on creating user-friendly spaces with facilities that encourage physical activity is needed. This includes:

- Large sidewalks
- Well-maintained walking paths
- Increasing shade coverage over sidewalks, walking paths, and playground equipment
- Increased sports fields (basketball, baseball, tennis, volleyball courts, etc.)
- Fixing missing pieces on playground equipment
- Well-lit parks during evening hours

When surveyed, few people mentioned that the parks landscaping (e.g. pruned bushes, flower beds), or aesthetics (e.g. artistic and historical features) were the reasons why they visited the park. Improving ornamental vegetation or adding artistic and historic/educational features (e.g. sculptures, fountains, and monuments) do not seem to be a community need, compared to creating more user-friendly spaces and/or tackling issues of perceived safety.

According to the surveys conducted variables that contributed to park utilization included: shade structures, availability of sporting assets such as tennis and basketball courts, open grass areas, and fencing separating the park from the road.

### **D. Surveys**

A total of 32 surveys were conducted. A higher proportion of survey respondents were female compared to male. The average age was 42, and the zip code of residence for most respondents was 89431. The largest racial/ethnic group living in the 89431 zip code according to the United States Census Bureau is Caucasians, followed by Hispanics.<sup>3</sup> This was representative in our data because the majority of survey respondents were Caucasian, followed by Hispanics. Non-survey respondents (people who did not want to be interviewed) were more likely to be male compared to female and were perceived to be Caucasian. In addition, most of the survey non-respondents occurred during the weekday between the times of 2-3:30pm.

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<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Reno City, Nevada; Nevada; UNITED STATES. Accessed July 2018 from: [www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/map/renocitynevada,nv,US/RH1125217](http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/map/renocitynevada,nv,US/RH1125217)

Figure 1. Survey Respondents and Non-respondents by Gender

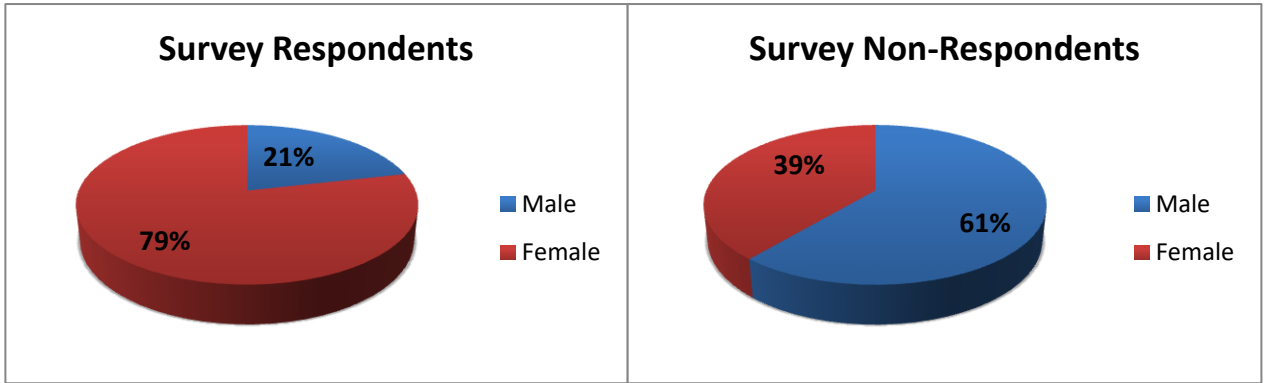


Figure 1 displays that more females responded to the survey compared to males.

Figure 2. Survey Respondents and Non-respondents by Race

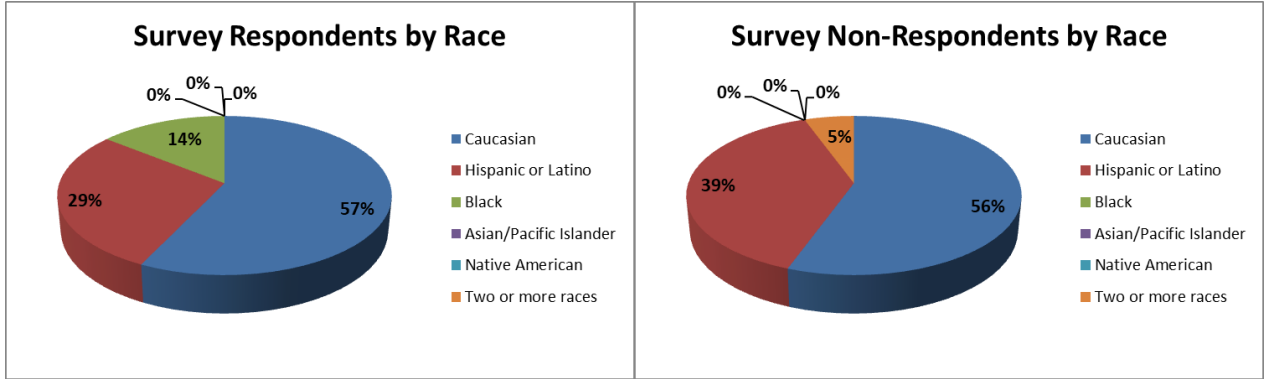
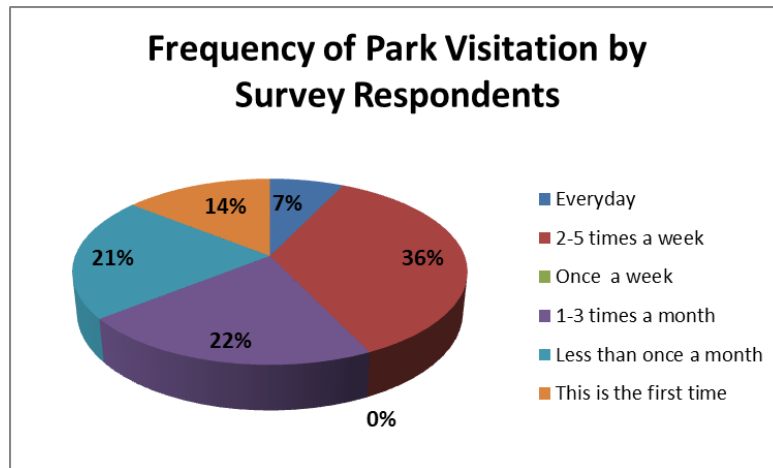


Figure 2 displays that for both survey respondents and survey non-respondents by race; Caucasians accounted for the largest racial group followed by Hispanics or Latinos. These percentages are representative of the racial/ethnic makeup in the 89431 zip code.

Figure 3. Frequency of Park Visitation by Survey Respondents



*Figure 5 represents the frequency of park visitation by survey respondents. Most survey respondents reported visiting a park 2-5 times a week, followed by visiting a park 1-3 times a month. When visiting the park the most popular activities included parents playing with their kids and using the playground.*

### Qualitative Responses from Surveys

A section of the survey included three open-ended questions. Survey respondents were asked “are there are any areas of the park you would avoid?” If yes, which areas and why? In addition, respondents were also asked “In one sentence, what do you like the most about this park?”, and “In one sentence what do you dislike the most about this park?”

Safety was the main reason survey respondents avoided certain areas of the park. Safety meant many different things including protecting their children from running onto main roads, presence of transients, or missing pieces to playground equipment. A number of respondents did voice that there were no parts of the park that they would avoid.

Common themes when asked what do you like most about this park included open grass areas, large walkways, and organized sports courts (e.g. basketball/tennis courts). A majority of survey respondents liked how there was a large space for their kids and/or pets to run around.

Lastly, common themes when asked what do you dislike about this park included lack of bathrooms, minimal shade coverage, and water fountains not working.

### **E. Conclusion**

There are commonalities between the Healthy Parks 89502 Pilot Project and the data gathered for this year’s 89431 Healthy Parks Project. Most notably, based on park counts, parks in both zip codes seem to be underutilized. Although the reason of why park utilization is low is a multifaceted one, findings from both studies attribute this to the lack of bike lanes surrounding parks, the lack of bus stops in the general vicinity of parks, the lack of shade coverage, and the condition of water fountains and bathrooms.

The differences observed between the two final reports include the different needs of community members regarding their local parks, and the reasoning of what disincentives local residents from utilizing their neighborhood parks. The 89502 Healthy Parks Pilot Project identified perceived safety as a main concern for local residents. The presence of adult males or juveniles, transients, or homeless was a frequent comment mentioned by survey respondents. However, this was not a common finding during the 89431 Parks Project. Findings from this study focused more on creating and maintaining user-friendly spaces with facilities that encourage physical activity. Most survey respondents liked the open grass areas, tennis/basketball courts, large walkways, and parks that provided a lot of shade.

These are important components that should be considered to improve local parks to hopefully increase overall physical activity.

## **F. Recommendations**

After conducting this year's 89431 Healthy Parks Project and comparing it to the 89502 Healthy Parks Pilot Project completed in 2017, recommendations that should be considered include:

- Increasing health promotion opportunities at parks
- Increasing community engagement of parks
- Increasing community events held at parks to encourage and increase physical activity
- Include additional open-ended questions in the survey portion to better determine specific barriers, disincentives, or determinants community members face when trying to visit their local parks
- Collect additional parks data in zip codes that have also been identified as having a high CNI score

### Programmatic Efforts

The WCHD continues to work on increasing opportunities for community members to utilize their local parks and engage in physical activity. Through targeted advertising one of the community events hosted by the WCHD was a [Jane's Walk](#). The purpose of this event was to showcase to the community how parks can be beneficial to their health. Additionally, participants were engaged in fun physical activities that they can do at a park using little to no equipment.

Recently the WCHD also began partnering with the Food Bank of Northern Nevada on the [Stay & Play Program](#). This program runs in conjunction with their Kids Café Summer Meals Program, a mobile program that delivers lunch to children in their local neighborhoods and parks. After the children finish their lunch the WCHD leads the Stay & Play program once a week at four different parks. The WCHD staff encourages participation in organized sports activities that they create and participate in as well to promote physical activity.

Furthermore, in collaboration with the City of Reno the WCHD is planning a family event at Yori Park in September. The goal is to activate this park and encourage community members to utilize their neighborhood park more often. At this event the WCHD will provide resources to increase physical activity levels as well as access to healthy and nutritious foods. To increase health promotion opportunities, the WCHD will be painting interactive games on the concrete at Yori park (e.g. hopscotch, long jump, ring step, etc.) which is planned to be showcased and revealed at the Yori Park event.