

THE CITY OF RAYMORE PARKS AND RECREATION

A Time For Parks

by Janet Snook

The city of Raymore is a bedroom community with rural, small town characteristics nestled 15- miles south of Kansas City in the northwest quadrant of Cass County. As the Kansas City metropolitan area encompasses more land area southward, development is quickly overtaking the city of Raymore. Subdivisions are being carved out of farmland at the rate of approximately 150-acres per year, quickly lessening the amount of open space that many of the new residents say is the reason they are moving to Raymore.

In conjunction with the growth in the town and the transformation from farmlands to suburbia, the population has increased significantly in the past few decades. Census figures have shown the population has doubled from 5,592 in the 1990 Census to over 11,000 in 2000. Currently, the population estimate has exceeded 13,000 and the number of residents is expected to rise to more than 20,000 by 2010.

Rapid growth in the 1980s and 1990s has left its effect on the City. Growth focused primarily on residential population and not on commercial growth. The limited commercial tax base left the city of Raymore struggling to keep up with its growing need for residential services. The late 1990s and early 2000s have been a period of "catch-up" for infrastructure upgrades in the areas of storm water and sanitary sewer systems, water tower construction, street widening, state highway expansion and municipal complex construction.

A Time For Parks

With many infrastructure upgrades coming online, the parks and recreation department is moving forward with park improvements and the planning of new parks and recreation projects. In the past few years, great strides have been made in the areas of athletic field construction, in part due to the generous assistance of volunteers from local youth athletic associations as well as from the passage of a parks and storm water sales tax in 1998.

A community survey was conducted in 1997 concerning household demographics and opinions on housing development preferences, public facility needs and other community resources. The final question allowed respondents to share their opinions regarding support of a property tax levy increase or



The Park Master Plan recommends that the city of Raymore identify trail corridors to connect neighborhoods throughout the City.

sales tax increase for improvements. Despite an identified need for many facilities, respondents did not support an increase in property tax for any of the community facilities. Responses showed support for a sales tax.

City leaders presented a ballot issue to Raymore voters for a half-cent sales tax that combined a five year storm water master plan with park improvements. The issue proposed the tax to be split 40 percent each for parks and storm water improvements and 20 percent to be spent on projects at the City Council's discretion. Voters passed the issue and bonds were issued to fund projects totaling nearly \$3.25 million, with \$880,000 in

bond projects assigned to parks.

Projects funded through bonds included construction of two concession stand and rest room facilities, design and construction of a park maintenance building, purchase and installation of three playground systems, installation of ball field lighting, design and construction of a lighted tennis court complex, design and construction of a lighted outdoor basketball court and rehabilitation of a walking trail.

Details, Details

The fruits of the sales tax passage have not been limited to these bonded capital projects. The sales tax revenue that exceeds the bond debt service has been used to fund several other capital improvements including the renovation of tennis courts and the construction of the City's first half-mile of a greenway trail. Further, an annual equipment replacement plan has been established to replace damaged picnic tables, park shelter grills and water fountains as well as to increase the City's inventory.

As a part of the City's newly established ten year capital improvement plan, parks and recreation has begun to develop a common signage system to "brand" the parks in an effort to create an identity for the City's park facilities and recreation programs. The first of these signs will be installed in late May 2004.

The Future For Raymore

With enhanced outdoor facilities, the parks and recreation department has been able to begin offering recreation programs to the community. Today, with two years of recreation programming under its belt, the department is looking positively toward its future and is planning accordingly. A Parks Master Plan was written and has been approved by the Raymore Parks and Recreation Board. The plan discusses six citywide recommendations that have been found to be critical to fostering the small town feel of the city of Raymore for the future.

These six are:

✓ Land Acquisition – The parks and recreation department must take a proactive role in preserving green space while development is underway.

✓ City Beautification – The parks and recreation department should begin designing park entry areas and public grounds green spaces with flower beds, attractive green space landscaping and tree planting throughout the park system.

✓ Park Image Program – The department has taken steps toward a full marketing and publicity plan that includes system identification through the consistent and purposeful use of a department logo, common amenities for every park in the system and common, identifiable entry and rules signs at every park.

✓ Development Of Planning Documents – The master plan discusses the development of the ten year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), an equipment replacement plan, a facility maintenance plan and a park development plan.

✓ Park Linkage System – The Park Master Plan recommends that the city of Raymore identify trail corridors to connect neighborhoods to each other, to a parkway system, to community parks and other community assets such as City Hall, public schools and shopping districts.

✓ Capital Projects – The City should prioritize capital projects identified in recent resident surveys including indoor and outdoor pools, a recreation center, a skate park, and trails and place them in the capital improvements plan.

Even Small Towns Can Think Big

For Raymore, the small number of big box commercial businesses limits the revenue generation potential of the sales tax. Although the use of the sales tax for parks and storm water is limited at this point in Raymore's growth, the city of Raymore has made significant strides with its park improvement projects. The Raymore Team, including staff, park board members, mayor and City Council are facing the challenge of growth together with an eye toward a bright future filled with recreational opportunities. □

Janet Snook is director of parks and recreation for the city of Raymore.