




C I T Y O F
RENO
Memorandum

DATE: May 18, 2026

TO: Mayor and City Council

THROUGH: Jackie Bryant, City Manager 

FROM: Nathan Ullyot, Parks and Recreation Director
Karina Mercier, Project Manager – Park Planner

DEPT: Parks and Recreation

SUBJECT: Update following the April 30, 2026 Joint Parks Commission presentation regarding the Regional Parks Service Plan

This memo is intended to provide Council a progress update on the Parks Service Plan Feasibility Study following the April 30, 2026 Joint Parks Commission presentation by PROS Consulting. As Council is aware, the Service Plan will investigate the feasibility of a Park District in our region as a collaborative effort between the City of Reno, City of Sparks, Sun Valley General Improvement District and Washoe County that has been in development since its approval on June 4, 2025. More information on the plan is available at OurParksNV.org.

Plan Progress to Date

Since Council approval of the agreement, City Parks staff has maintained regular meetings with the project team and staff is pleased to share that the Service Plan is on track for completion by late summer/early fall of 2026. PROS Consulting has visited the region three times since project kickoff to conduct site tours for each system, stakeholder meetings, focus groups and staff interviews to gather feedback and identify key themes. The demographics and recreation trends analysis as well as the inventory information and level of service have been collected and analyzed for each agency. Finally, both a statistically valid random and online community survey were administered. Key findings of the stakeholder interviews, surveys and levels of service analyses are included in this memo.

Stakeholder Interview Feedback

A series of stakeholder interviews that included more than 40 individuals (Elected officials, City/County staff, special user groups, local businesses, organization leaders, park users) were conducted to gauge interest and gather feedback on the potential formation of a special district with the objective to gain perspective from key stakeholders. Key themes resulting from these conversations included:

- Equitable Governance & Representation - Strong desire for fair decision-making, funding allocation, and protections for smaller jurisdictions.
- Sustainable & Transparent Funding - Dedicated funding sources, clear cost–benefit analysis, and concerns over tax impacts.
- Operational, Legal & Cultural Complexity - Challenges merging staff, labor agreements, service boundaries, and organizational cultures.
- Consistency of Services & Quality - Risk of uneven service levels or diluted recreation quality across a larger district.
- Maintenance Before Expansion - Strong preference to address deferred maintenance before adding new facilities.
- Preservation of Community Identity & Local Control - Desire to retain unique character, programming, and responsiveness to local needs.
- Public Trust, Buy-In & Social Challenges - Need for transparency, outreach, and coordinated approaches to safety and homelessness.

Survey Results

The statistically valid survey was mailed to random sample households in Washoe County with the option to be completed online or over the phone. 748 surveys were collected, 400 from Reno, 184 from Sparks and 164 from Washoe County outside of Reno/Sparks with a margin of error at +/-3.6%. Key findings from the survey were as follows:

- Most respondents, regardless of where they live (Reno 77%, Sparks 81%, Washoe 78%) believe park services are NOT consistent across neighborhoods
- Most (94%) respondents believe it is important to have equal access to parks and rec opportunities
- Most (70%) respondents – regardless of area – believe that a single district could improve efficiency and quality
- There is strong alignment with the most important improvements that a single district could offer (Improve consistency of operations and maintenance was #1 response).
- 72% of all respondents were either “Very Supportive” or “Supportive” of creating a dedicated funding source to fund a regional Parks Service District. There were no significant differences based on voter registration or propensity to vote.
- When asked what level of additional annual cost they would be comfortable with, most respondents said they would be comfortable with \$25 or more per household per year.
- Overall, most (Reno 70%, Sparks 65%, Washoe County 55%) respondents are “very likely” or “likely” to vote in favor to establish a regional Parks Service District.

In addition to the statistically valid survey, a second survey was conducted that could be accessed online by the general population, collecting 502 additional responses. There was strong alignment between the survey responses and similar levels of favorable support for creating a dedicated funding source and likeliness to vote in favor of establishing a regional Parks Service District. However, the online survey indicated respondents desired lower levels of funding in terms of annual household spend to support the district. It is important to note that respondent demographics vary significantly for the two surveys and the online respondents do not align with the composition of Washoe County residents, therefore data from the online survey should not supersede the statistically valid set.

Level of Service Analysis and Operational Assessment

Levels of Service describe how effectively current inventory levels for each regional agency's parkland, trails, outdoor facilities and recreation space serve current population levels. This analysis uses metrics provided by the National Recreation and Parks Association, which is the most comprehensive source of benchmarks and insights for park and recreation agencies nationwide. PROS Consulting's analysis of these benchmarks found that the needs exist for the region in the areas of parkland, trails, flat fields, outdoor pools and recreation space.

From an operational perspective, PROS consulting found staffing levels are below the national median for each agency and the amount of acreage each employee is responsible for exceeds the national standard as well. Further, the per capita investment is lower than the national median as established by NRPA: The national standard for 2025 was \$77.34/per capita compared to \$42.23 for Reno, \$21.18 for Washoe, \$57.94 for Sparks, \$16.60 for Sun Valley and \$48.13 per capita overall. This indicates a lower level of investment in Parks and Recreation as compared to other agencies nationwide.

Service Plan – NRS 318.A

NRS318A.170 establishes that formation of a special district is accomplished via adoption of an ordinance by the governing body.

It further establishes that the district would be governed by a Board of Trustees comprised of 5 members. These members would be:

- Appointed by counties and cities within the District
- Determine by lot which serve 2- and 4-year terms
- Then elected biennially

District Powers as established by NRS 318A.300 are as follows:

- Acquire, construct and improve projects for parks, trails and opens space
- Such facilities may include playgrounds, ball parks, public parks, beaches, marinas, gymnasiums, trails, open spaces and many other named types of recreation and park facilities
- Any local government located within the boundary of the District may contribute revenues / facilities to the District

- The District may levy fees and assessments
- Subject to an agreement with the County a District may levy ad valorem taxes
- Subject to some limitations a District may issue debt including general obligation, revenue and special assessment bonds

Next Steps

Service Framework Development (Month 1)

- Define a clear menu of services (operations, maintenance, programming, capital delivery) with baseline service standards applied equitably across the district.
- Identify which services launch on Day One versus phased implementation.

District Boundary & Participation Options (Month 1)

- Confirm proposed district boundaries and evaluate participation scenarios (members, phased entry, service contracts).
- Analyze population, assessed value, and asset contributions for each jurisdiction.

Funding & Governance Structure (Month 2)

- Evaluate dedicated revenue options aligned with voter tolerance and statutory authority.
- Develop a governance model focused on equitable representation, transparency, and local identity protection.

Asset & Staffing Transition Planning (Month 2)

- Define how existing assets and staff transition or are managed through agreements without reducing current service levels.
- Establish maintenance and capital prioritization strategies based on need, condition, and equity.

Service Plan & Engagement Milestones (Month 3)

- Build the statutorily required Service Plan (NRS 318A), supported by financial modeling and public outreach.
- Engage elected officials, park boards, and the public early to refine assumptions and build confidence before formal adoption steps.