



# METRAPARK VISION 2025

50 MORE YEARS

## *Public Outreach and Engagement Findings*

July 2021

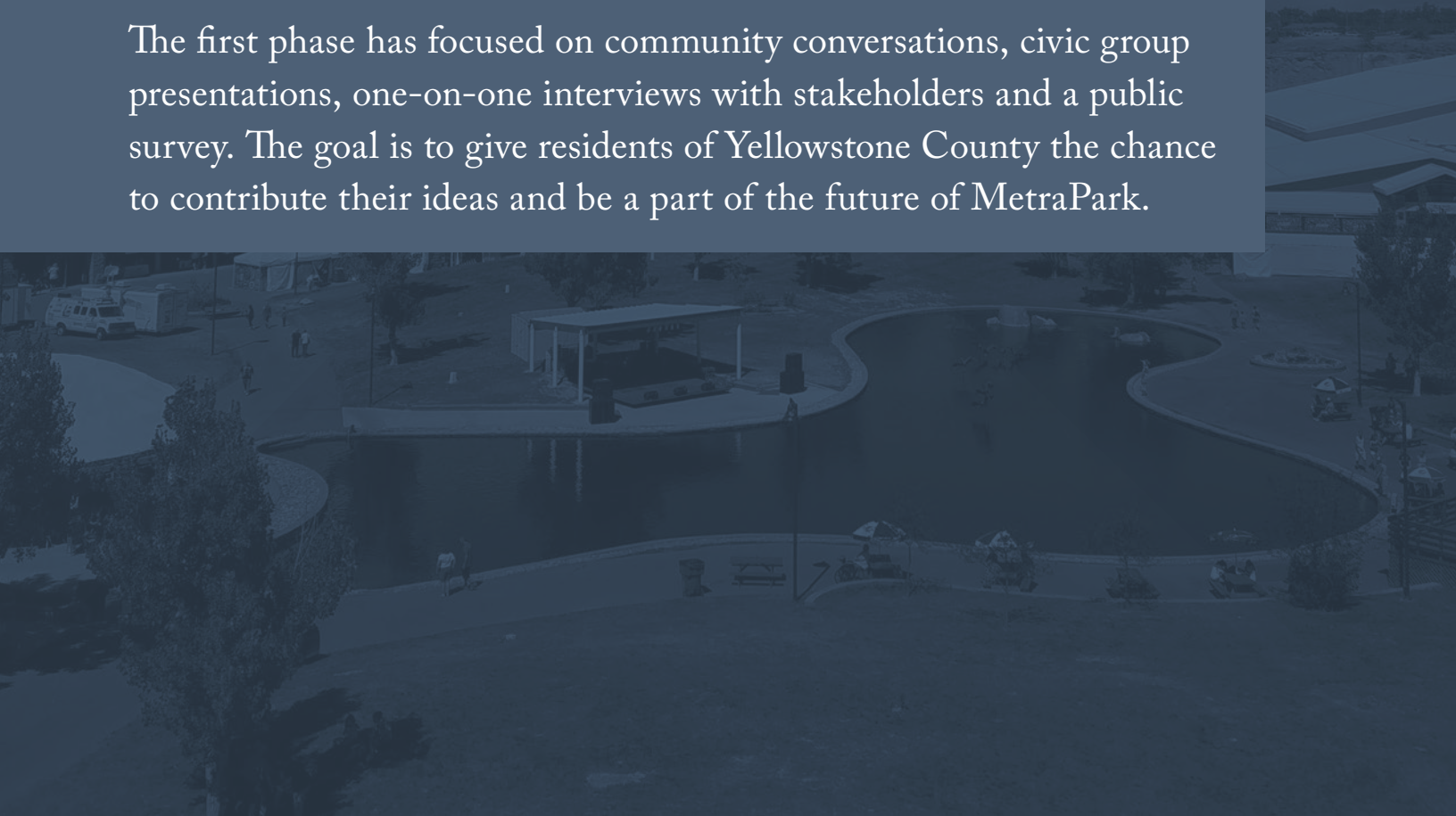
Report prepared by:



# Embracing the FUTURE of MetraPark

MetraPark will mark 50 years of serving Yellowstone County in 2025. In anticipation of this milestone, the MetraPark Advisory Board and leadership began a process in early 2020 to develop a new Master Plan for campus centered around public input and community outreach.

The first phase has focused on community conversations, civic group presentations, one-on-one interviews with stakeholders and a public survey. The goal is to give residents of Yellowstone County the chance to contribute their ideas and be a part of the future of MetraPark.



## Design Workshops

Cushing Terrell, with the support of Designing Trust and Kinetic Marketing, hosted four public design workshops in early May. Large maps of the MetraPark campus were provided, along with tools to draw amenities, lay out facilities and imagine new developments.

## Listening Sessions

To ensure that rural communities in Yellowstone County had the chance to weigh in on the planning process, the Planning Team also hosted four listening sessions in Lockwood, Laurel, Shepherd and Huntley.

## Steering Committee and Workgroups

In addition to public participation, the Planning Team engaged targeted stakeholders to provide more detailed input on a handful of priority areas identified in the preliminary research report conducted by Designing Trust and Kinetic Marketing in late 2020 and early 2021.

*Six specific workgroups were developed to dive deeply and explore options regarding:*

- Agriculture
- Athletics
- Conferences/Tradeshows
- Events/Entertainment
- Landscaping
- Placemaking/Culture

In addition, a 16-member steering committee, including the chairs of the workgroups, was assembled and is helping to guide the overall process. These workgroups and steering committee are a response to the feedback provided in the preliminary research report, which indicated that people want to see local experts providing real-world business experience in the planning process.

## Key Take-Aways

- *A need* for a Master Plan that fully embraces the potential of the MetraPark to define our community and be an iconic draw to the area
- *A belief* that MetraPark should be the place where the entire community gathers, such that amenities and programming respond to a wider number of users
- *A desire* to see MetraPark operations and events continue to grow and be better

Specifically, however, community members varied widely in their ideas, hopes, preferred amenities and improvements – and provided some inventive, innovating and exciting ideas for the vision for MetraPark.



## Circulation Meets Safety

A key and recurring theme in all of our outreach was focused on walkability, accessibility and safety. Community members would love a campus easy to navigate with upgraded walkways, paths and lighting. Landscaping techniques that can be effective in crime prevention were also discussed.

## Beautify Campus

MetraPark is the gateway to our city – beautifying the campus was a huge priority for nearly all participants. Everything from more landscaping, trees and green space, to giving First Interstate Arena a major upgrade (inside and out).

## Proposed Facilities

*The need and hope for new and exciting facilities were discussed at length.*

### *Outdoor Amphitheater*

The idea that an outdoor amphitheater would attract new and different kinds of performers to Billings, that more culturally diverse celebrations could be held there, and that facing it toward the Rims or Four Dances – improving the connection of MetraPark to its natural surroundings – were all reasons why this idea inspired so much excitement.

### *Multi-Use Space*

We heard that MetraPark really needs a space that is multi-use in every sense and can host anything from concerts to smaller community events.

### *Default Dirt Floor Facility*

The agriculture workgroup honed in on the need for a year-round multi-use default dirt floor facility. They mentioned that similar facilities nationwide are booked up to 50 weeks a year!



*Want to learn more or give us your ideas?  
Follow us on Facebook or visit [www.metraparkvision.com](http://www.metraparkvision.com)*

# Major Trends

Throughout the public engagement phase, we heard that the majority of community members like and appreciate the current events and concerts that are available – but fully hope for more and better music events overall and a greater diversity of programming.

## ***Building on MetraPark's Strengths: athletics, agriculture and entertainment***

People often describe MetraPark as mixed-use and able to host and support a large variety of events. However, we heard regularly about opportunities associated with a new multi-use facility that would allow for even more flexibility and broaden MetraPark's ability to host more events of various sizes.

Athletics was a key driver in this area with the workgroup examining the sporting events as one of the largest draws to the community. They talked about the enormous impact of having a facility that can house statewide and regional tournaments. It was even pointed out that the Billings' Shrine Auditorium has been a staple for Class B and C sporting events, and with it likely going away, MetraPark is the perfect position to host these events.

However, both community input and the different user groups we spoke to expressed a range of opinions on what such a hybrid facility should include: default dirt floor vs. concrete floor, grandstands vs. flexible seating, covered vs. open-air/retractable roof.





## The Connection Between the Rimrocks and the Yellowstone River

Many stakeholders and residents want to see a greater connection from the Rims to the river – and see MetraPark play a crucial role in creating that intersection.

We heard wide-ranging ideas. For instance, some ideas focused on developing new trails that begin on the Rims and travel through the MetraPark campus and on to the river's edge. Others considered the idea of reorienting buildings to showcase views of the Rimrocks or the Yellowstone, and we also heard thoughts about opening up use of the bluffs under the north parking lot for things like rock climbing or projecting movies.

One thing is certain, using the riverfront is a strong theme for many. Public input strongly reflected a real desire to be near the Yellowstone for recreation and for commercial development.

## Get Outside

Participants also frequently expressed a desire for better use of the outdoor spaces on the MetraPark campus. We heard exciting ideas from community members and the workgroups about opportunities for more usable green space on the campus, both for beautification and activities.

Building onto Chiesa Plaza and identifying additional gathering areas were among the many discussion points. But again, how people envisioned using the green space covered the spectrum. For some this outdoor space would be most desirable for more passive recreation like picnicking and socializing. Others see green space as an additional option for programming, suggesting that open spaces could be used for music festivals, beer gardens, powwows and hosting community events such as Summerfair – and more. The pragmatic pointed out that the intentional inclusion of green space for recreation now would set aside some land for future flexibility, expansion and planning needs.



## Landscaping

Throughout our initial primary research and public outreach efforts, comments surround the need for improved landscaping on and around MetraPark were some of the most frequent we heard. The landscaping workgroup was developed and tasked with creating a detailed list of recommendations, including strategies for incorporating CPTED (crime prevention through environmental design) concepts on the campus.

The workgroup identified the need to develop clear landscape planting standards for future plans that would incorporate principles such as planting for the long term, sustainable design principles, embracing native trees and plants that require a low volume of water, and consideration for low-cost maintenance. As part of this, irrigation needs were also discussed as was the opportunity to take advantage of both the river frontage and stormwater collection.

Safety and security was another topic – the need to ensure that perimeter plantings and other landscaping don't create hiding spaces or interfere with sight lines of both pedestrians and drivers.

### ***Trees***

The workgroup talked about opportunities to screen unsightly areas (like maintenance buildings and the sewer plant) with new trees. They suggested working with the City Arborist to develop tree standards and recommended planting blue spruce and other evergreen trees where possible (no cottonwood!).

### ***Gardens!***

The workgroup discussed utilizing a demonstration garden focusing on indigenous plants that would not only showcase beautiful landscaping, but also create awareness around some of the cultural aspects of our area. Possible examples are a space for a "prairie" garden or integrating a sensory garden. They considered these options given space availability and existing gardens.

### ***Camping?***

One of the more interesting ideas that came out of the landscape workgroup sessions was about creating a space for camping along the river's edge, integrating good shade trees and gardens throughout. It was mentioned that the Glacier KOA is a good model and that there might be opportunity for a private operator to manage this area in partnership with the Metra/County.

### ***Hardscaping***

Beyond the trees, shrubs and plants, the workgroup also dove into the opportunities for outdoor hardscaping on the MetraPark campus. The group looked at potential options for creating connections to and expanding the existing trails that surround the site. They identified the need for improved signage, wayfinding and efficient lighting across the campus. ADA accessibility and bicycle trails and parking were also discussed.



# Transportation and Access

Another prominent issue regularly highlighted by participants focused on access, circulation and walkability. Event sponsors and hoteliers have noted difficulties in access during events for ridesharing or sponsored vans and buses. Currently, it is difficult to access MetraPark by any means other than a personal vehicle. Crossing Main Street, Expo Drive or 1st/4th/6th Ave. is difficult and dangerous. In addition, residents would like to see more walking paths and bike trails on the campus, allowing easier navigation between buildings.

To address this, concepts are being developed for improved egress/ingress and circulation. This includes additional access points with more entry and exit options.

## Proposed Facilities and First Interstate Arena Overhaul Outdoor Amphitheater

Ideas surrounding the potential of a new outdoor amphitheater inspired significant enthusiasm from participants. There were discussions about how a nice outdoor venue could potentially attract more and a larger variety of artists and performers. It was also pointed out that Gathering of Nations and other cultural celebrations could be held there, and with purposeful orientation (toward the Rims or Three Dances), some of that connection would be strengthened. *There were concerns as well:*

- What about size- what's the perfect number of seats?
- What happens to the amphitheater during winter months?
- Is there any chance that Dehler Park will become a competing outdoor facility?
- Billings pulls from a smaller pool than Missoula. Is this an issue?





## Default Dirt Floor Facility

We heard that a default dirt floor multi-use facility would be a big boon to the Ag community. The workgroup described a real need for a facility that is affordable because of the expense of bringing in dirt for an event. It was also pointed out that “clean dirt” is also an issue because roping and animal events can’t take place if the dirt is contaminated with metal or plastic items that may be the result of other events using the same dirt.

## First Interstate Arena

Our public engagement phase also allowed us to fully understand the community’s perceptions of the First Interstate Area and their real desire to upgrade nearly all aspects of the space.

We heard that all arena rooms need major overhauls and upgrades, that the current facilities typically are extremely dirty, and that when you walk in, it doesn’t feel inviting as it’s all concrete and not aesthetically pleasing.

Other ramifications were also discussed. For example, if MetraPark continues to bring in large shows, the arena needs to focus on making entertainers happy. Both the green room and the locker rooms need major upgrades.

Finally, there was a common sentiment that the MetraPark Value Proposition is off: There is a perception of quantity over quality. The general feeling is that MetraPark is trying to do more shows rather than better shows.

## MetraPark Staff and Management

We received repeated feedback from stakeholders related to perceptions of operational challenges at MetraPark. Participants in the process have raised concerns about insufficient staffing (both in overall numbers and specific skill sets) to fully support facilities in place now; a perception that MetraPark staff doesn’t have a customer service and/or problem-solving culture; and noted challenges in collaborating and communicating with staff for a successful event.

We also heard that there seems to be a culture of “No” at MetraPark and that the staff doesn’t often seem willing to try and fix issues for people renting the spaces. There is also a pervasive perception that there is not enough professionalism and little responsiveness to the needs of event sponsors. There is frustration that MetraPark is overly risk-averse. People are disappointed when they hear about some of the events that Metra passes on.



## Culture at MetraPark

Another perspective that we heard throughout the public engagement phase was the need for MetraPark to be more culturally inclusive. MetraPark should be a space for people of all races, ages and walks of life.

Our placemaking/culture workgroup talked about the importance of reflecting on the history of this area. For instance, while the land MetraPark occupies was never “owned” by tribal entities, not many people know that at least 60-100 tribes have occupied the lands at some point in time.

The workgroup thought about how to build on the historical strengths of the area, including American Indian legacy and heritage as well as cowboy history.

One thought focused on providing interpretative signage to point out the historical areas around MetraPark, like Sacrifice Cliffs, to help broaden the education and understanding around tribal history and culture.

The ultimate goal would be celebrate our native history and make anyone and everyone feel welcome at MetraPark.

## Appendices

The complete report outlining the preliminary stakeholder interviews conducted in early 2021 is available here: <https://metraparkvision.com/wp-content/uploads/MetraPark-Primary-Research.pdf>.



# METRAPARK

## Steering Committee & Workgroup Members

### Agriculture

Bob Cook, Chair  
Adam Gilbertson  
Bo Brunisma  
Brandon Wittman  
Butch Bratsky  
Chad Resig  
Jann Parker  
Keith Robinson  
Teddi Vogel  
Duane Haugen  
Karen Yost  
Roni Baker  
Russell Nemitz  
Steve Lackman  
Taylor Brown

### Athletics

Brandon Sullivan, Chair  
Brian Michelotti  
Joe Kusek  
Kim Kaiser  
Kory Thompson  
Kristi Drake  
Mike Erickson  
Mike Mayott  
Mike Ryan  
Timothy Bastian  
Jim Tevlin  
Mark Wahl  
Rich Hash

### Conference & Trade Shows

Mike Nelson, Chair  
Alex Tyson  
Allison Round  
Dustin Bretz  
Steve Wahrlich  
Beau & Devon Hedin  
Dave Veeder  
Jeff Muri  
Matt Brosovich  
Traci Marchwinski

### Events & Entertainment

Shelli Mann, Chair  
Bethany Hein  
Jeff Ewelt  
Lindsay Richardson  
Sean Lynch  
Duane Sitzman  
Jim Markel  
John Roberts  
Margie Prokop  
Michelle Williams

### Landscaping & Aesthetics

Brian Godfrey, Chair  
Dan Brooks  
Dave Wanzenreid  
KC Williams  
Randy Pardis  
Steve Restad  
Clint Lunde  
Larry Berrin  
Laurel Garden Club  
Melissa Henderson  
Steve Riley

### Placemaking & Culture

Nell Eby, Chair  
Anna Paige  
Bill Snell  
Brad Constantine  
Charlie Yegen  
Ignacio Barrón Viela  
Jan Dietrich  
Jody Grant  
Zack Terakedis  
Bryan W. Knicely  
Dianne Lehm  
Kevin Kooistra

### Steering Committee

Brian Brown, Chair  
Bob Cook  
Brandon Sullivan  
Brian Godfrey  
Dave Ballard  
Jim Duncan  
Karen Miller  
Lisa Perry  
Matt Robertson  
Mike Dimich  
Mike Nelson  
Nell Eby  
Ron Sexton  
Shelli Mann

# Thank you to our community supporters!

St. V's Foundation

BSEDA

BIRD

Billings Deaconess Foundation

1st Interstate Bank

Denny Menholt Group

Computers Unlimited

CMS

Ace Electric

Archie Cochrane

Langlas and Associates

NorthWestern Energy

VIP Services, Inc.

Bill Cole

Pepsi-Cola Bottling Company of Billings

PAYS

Thompson Cattle Inc.

B. Harrington

Don and Carol Roberts

J & L Livestock

Jakes Downtown

KB Chemical

Simonson Architects

MT International Supply

Jeff Muri

Walt Stieg

Mike Schmeckel

Rick Reid

Greg McDonald

Charles Loveridge

Steve Solberg

Ziggy Ziegler

Jim Lowe



*Report prepared by:*

**Kinetic Marketing & Creative**  
117 N. Broadway, Billings, Montana 59101  
406.534.2140 | [info@kineticmc.com](mailto:info@kineticmc.com) | [kineticmc.com](http://kineticmc.com)

