



# **STRATEGIC PLAN**

## **2026 - 2030**

*Adopted by Board of Trustees: Dec. 9, 2025*

## About the Akron Parks Collaborative

Akron Parks Collaborative, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, has a mission of working to engage the community around the creation and sustainability of vibrant public spaces within the City of Akron. We foster and support neighborhood parks advocates by enabling them to meet their goals, partner with the city and instill a sense of stewardship among parks users.

**Our intended impact is that every neighborhood has created a plan for its parks, developed with and for community members, with resources for implementation and maintenance.**

Through focused relationship cultivation and management, Akron Parks Collaborative is the strategic partner for the City of Akron's initiatives around neighborhood parks. Akron Parks Collaborative is dedicated to protecting Akron's parks and making them relevant, enjoyable and accessible for all residents by instilling a sense of stewardship for their care and maintenance. We believe that parks are a key component of local revitalization and community investment. Our core values reflect our belief that neighborhood residents can be a powerful force for making the city's parks stronger and accessible to all in our community.

## Strategic Planning Process

The APC Board and executive staff embarked on a strategic planning process in 2025 with the intention of developing a plan that would identify strategic priorities and align the efforts of all those involved in supporting the organization's mission.

This strategic plan sets the overall direction for APC for 2026-2030. The strategic priorities identified in this plan reflect our commitment to growth and improvement—in service excellence, in visibility and awareness, in leadership capacity, and in financial strength and stability.

The critical issues that were considered during the development of this plan included:

- What currently is working well within APC? What significant accomplishments have occurred in the past two years?
- What hasn't worked out well? What lessons were learned?
- Considering economic, social, and political factors, what is APC's greatest opportunity for growth and/or impact in the next few years?
- Are there any internal barriers that could keep APC from achieving its goals? (Barriers could include organizational culture, staff turnover, outdated technology/systems, resistance to change, communications, and/or organizational structure.)
- What, if any, external barriers are a challenge for APC to overcome? (Barriers could include shortage of resources or staffing; a lack of key community/corporate partnerships; or public visibility/image.)
- Is there anything within the organization or in the external environment that has the potential to destabilize APC's operations?
- What opportunities are there for using technology to improve the quality and/or increase the efficiency of APC's operations?
- What would success look like in five years? How would the community be different because of APC?

The planning process included individual interviews with members of the Board of Directors, staff and key stakeholders. A meeting was held with representatives of the parks friends groups, and a survey was sent to Akron City Council members. The ideas and insights that came from the interviews, the meeting, the survey and a board/staff retreat held in October were used to inform the development of the strategic priorities, goals and objectives included in this plan.

An operations/implementation plan will be developed to ensure the achievement of the goals in this plan, and we will monitor key indicators that reflect our progress toward meeting specific performance targets. The duration of this strategic plan is expected to be five years, depending on shifting internal priorities, external factors and the pace and success of implementation.

## Definition of Terms

**Strategic Priorities:** Strategic priorities are high-level topics or activities that APC wants to particularly encourage and promote over the long term. These priorities will guide budget and resource allocations decisions.

**Strategic Goals:** Strategic goals are the milestones that APC aims to achieve that evolve from the strategic priorities. They transform strategic priorities into specific performance targets that impact the entire organization. Goals can be qualitative or quantitative.

**Strategic Objectives:** Strategic objectives identify the approaches or activities that will be carried out to achieve the strategic goals.

**Annual Operations Plans:** The strategic priorities, goals and objectives identified in this Strategic Plan are intended to be at a high level and relevant for the next four to five years. The successful implementation of the plan will rely on the development of annual operations plans that include annual goals and specific, measurable objectives, and identify individuals or groups accountable for the achievement of objectives, performance indicators and desired outcomes.

## Strategic Priorities for FY 2026-2030

**Strategic Priority 1:** We will provide high quality, sustainable programs and services that are closely aligned with our mission and values.

**Strategic Priority 2:** We will build financial strength and sustainability through accountability, revenue growth and diversification, and risk management.

**Strategic Priority 3:** We will grow the community's awareness, understanding and support for the City parks and our programs.

**Strategic Priority 4:** We will follow best practices in nonprofit governance and seek innovative ways to attract, retain and reward a high-performing workforce and board.

## Strategic Priorities, Goals and Objectives

**Strategic Priority 1: We will provide high quality, sustainable programs and services that are closely aligned with the APC mission and values.**

**Strategic Goal 1-1: Create and support an alliance of neighborhood parks advocates.**

### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:

- Support existing friends groups with guidance, tools, and resources; consider making these and other resources available through a web portal.
- Host regular gatherings of friends/neighborhood groups to solicit feedback, encourage exchange of ideas, and foster connections.
- Provide regular communication to friends/neighborhood groups regarding APC activities, best practices and ideas from other communities.
- Hold annual training conference for friends/neighborhood groups.
- Identify and reach out to aligned neighborhood groups not currently connected to APC and add to our communication network.

**Strategic Goal 1-2: Grow and innovate the Akron Parks Challenge.**

### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:

- Continue to review and revise framework for Challenge grants process, with a focus on building equity into the decision-making process.
- Hold a pre-proposal workshop for Challenge applicants.
- Develop program of smaller grants to encourage more neighborhood group engagement and develop capacity for larger projects.

**Strategic Goal 1-3: Expand the Nature in our Neighborhoods, City Meadows Program**

### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:

- Continue work with the City to develop and foster a coalition of advocates for city meadows
- Refine the engagement process for each new project and tailor it to each neighborhood

**Strategic Goal 1-4: Develop and implement an equity decision-making framework using our equity statement as the starting point.**

### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:

- Determine and agree upon a definition for APC on what equity means in relation to parks (what are the elements to consider when judging which parks need attention to be more equitable?)
- Adapt the definition into an agreed upon framework or rubric for the Challenge to ensure rating equity is consistent in what is considered

**Strategic Goal 1-5: Develop metrics for ongoing parks evaluation and ways to measure the impact of community collaboration on parks investment and stewardship.**

**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:**

- *Identify key performance indicators and methods of measurement.*
- *Strengthen the public life survey process and create presentation method*

**Strategic Priority 2: We will build financial strength and sustainability through accountability and revenue growth and diversification.**

**Strategic Goal 2-1: Ensure sound fiscal practices.**

**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:**

- Develop and maintain annual budgets that reflect a clear picture of organizational resources and priorities.
- Manage metrics for financial performance and define triggers for taking corrective action.
- Minimize risk through strong internal controls.
- Demonstrate transparency and accountability by providing timely and accurate financial reports to the board, funders, and others as appropriate.

**Strategic Goal 2-2: Increase revenue and manage expenses through efficient and effective allocation of resources.**

**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:**

- Review existing and potential programs/projects to ensure that financial as well as programmatic objectives are achieved.
- Identify and engage new partners for collaboration.
- Negotiate terms of agreement with City of Akron to improve cash flow, including the possibility of a multi-year agreement.

**Strategic Goal 2-3: Continue to build our fundraising expertise and explore opportunities to secure charitable donations.**

**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:**

- Develop and implement a comprehensive fundraising plan that includes grants, special events, corporate sponsorships and a board member campaign.
- Develop the infrastructure needed to support expanded financial development activities, including a donor database/CRM system.
- Explore the possibility of hiring a development professional to guide or lead fundraising efforts.
- Continue to apply for renewed and first-time grants to support ongoing and new

- projects.
- Monitor and access opportunities from local, state, and federal entities that could increase resources for our services.
- Expand the role of Board members in financial development activities including cultivation, solicitation, and stewardship.

### **Strategic Priority 3: We will grow the community's awareness, understanding and support for the City parks and our programs.**

#### **Strategic Goal 3-1: Strengthen City administration and Council support for the APC mission and goals.**

##### **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:**

- Share 2026-2030 strategic plan with Mayor and key City officials.
- Meet with Council members to review strategic plan and clarify their understanding of APC role and responsibilities.
- Provide City administration and Council with regular updates on APC projects and accomplishments.
- Attend Ward meetings as requested to share APC activities and engage community members.
- Work with City to plan corporate support request for Akron Parks Challenge
- Partner with City efforts to develop city-wide parks master plan, serving as the community engagement lead.

#### **Strategic Goal 3-2: Continue to strengthen the APC brand identity and raise our visibility within the community.**

##### **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:**

- Develop and implement strategies that increase APC's name recognition and brand awareness.
- Continue to execute a comprehensive communications plan that leverages traditional channels as well as digital and social media.
- Maintain our website and other social media channels as valuable resources for current and potential community partners, friends groups, and donors.
- Share strategic plan to inspire, engage and educate current and potential community partners.

#### **Strategic Goal 3-3: Continue to use story-telling campaign to demonstrate value of parks and the need for better planning and investment.**

##### **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:**

- Share stories that convey the vital role of parks in connecting neighbors and building community.



- Work with friends groups to develop more story content to share on social media.
- Share data that supports positive impact of investment in parks.

**Strategic Priority 4: We will follow best practices in nonprofit governance and seek innovative ways to attract, retain and reward a high-performing board and workforce.**

**Strategic Goal 4-1: Recruit, develop, and support a Board of Directors that provides leadership, governance and oversight following the best practices of nonprofit governance.**

**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:**

- Recruit board members with experience and connections in critical areas of organizational focus, including community engagement, environment, recreation, arts and culture, and fundraising.
- Review and revise the APC by-laws as necessary to meet changing organizational needs.
- Establish standing and ad hoc committees as needed to provide oversight for critical organizational functions.
- Ensure that the board maintains its focus on our key performance indicators.
- Provide board members with a thorough orientation and ongoing education about the organization, the industry, and external forces affecting APC.
- Develop and maintain succession plans for key leadership positions.
- Support, direct and evaluate the executive director.

**Strategic Goal 4-2: Recruit, retain, recognize and reward motivated and talented employees.**

**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:**

- Ensure that our staff reflects the skills and competencies needed to achieve our mission and our strategic priorities.
- Periodically review compensation and benefits to ensure the ability to attract and retain talented employees.
- Maintain a performance management system that ensures accountability, provides feedback, and rewards outstanding results.