

Section 9: Parks, Recreation and Open Space

The Parks, Recreation and Open Space Element of the comprehensive plan serves as a guide for decision making regarding the number, type, and location of future parks to complete the parks system within McKinney.

This element identifies goals and objectives for the development of the parks, recreation and open space system in the City of McKinney. It establishes the levels of service (LOS) and standards for each park type and makes recommendations for policies that will help achieve the quality of service expected by the citizens of the community.

The McKinney Comprehensive Plan's Parks, Recreation and Open Space Element has been created as the link between the adopted Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan and the Land Use Element of the Comprehensive Plan.

9.1 Goals and Objectives

The development of goals and objectives that provide direction for McKinney's park system is necessary to ensure that all aspects of the parks element work toward a common end result. The following are the goals and objectives set by the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan, which complement the goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan. These goals were developed through the public participation portion of the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan process, which included user surveys, focus groups, and phone surveys.

Goal 1. Expand the park system to maintain and enhance the physical form and image of the City of McKinney.

- Parks should be timeless.
- Parks should be unique to McKinney to celebrate its character and qualities.
- Parks should be site specific and integrate well into the urban design and landscape of the surrounding area.
- Open space should be prevalent enough and interspersed to present an image that McKinney has a great amount of open space.
- Image helps economic development, therefore the economy.

Goal 2. Preserve and protect open space, cultural landscapes and natural resources within the City.

- Open space is valuable; use it to preserve, solidify, and announce McKinney's image, as part of the City's systems of portals.
- Use open space to protect creeks, tree covered areas, prairie land and agricultural landscapes.
- Keep McKinney looking like McKinney by not developing everything.
- Plan to protect the creeks and important view sheds.

Goal 3. Provide a system of green infrastructure that links parks, schools, neighborhoods, businesses/retail areas, greenbelts, and open space through physical connections.

- "Green" is appropriate and necessary.
- Plan today for a green, walkable and bikeable community tomorrow.
- Open space benefits both the environment and people, e.g. clean

- area, clean water, flood protection, carbon sink, etc.
- Green infrastructure promotes healthy activity.
- Provide a sustainable recreational & transportation infrastructure within the City.
- Green infrastructure comprises alternative transportation.
- Green infrastructure ensures a connected community.

Goal 4. Create and provide a variety of opportunities accessible to every citizen meeting the needs of a diverse citizenry and supporting the individual, family, and community health and well-being of all.

- Enhanced well-being leads to improved quality of life.
- Recognizing diversity means understanding individual's desired outcomes and different programs, accessibility, and approaches.
- Adults & children have different needs.
- Varied but coordinated opportunities serving a diverse citizenry will help bring people together as a community.

Goal 5. Optimize the utilization of existing resources across other public, private, nonprofit and commercial entities through shared resources, partnership, etc.

- Create a structure and process for implementing a comprehensive sharing plan.
- Understand and define the criteria that are essential for the City to participate (legal, financial, ethical, etc.).
- Create opportunities for outside assistance with funding.
- Understand the inter-relationship between parks, open space and a healthy economy.
- Connect community through city and non-city cooperation and interaction.

Goal 6. Maintain the character and community feel of the City as it grows and ages.

- During the public input process, the overwhelming message was that the McKinney citizens cherish its "character and community feel."
- McKinney has never looked like a Dallas suburb; its future vision is to be unique;
- Definable uniqueness is an advantage in economic competition for employers and residents.
- Maintenance of the community feel will enhance the unique image of the community and attract businesses.

9.2 The Planning Process

The Parks, Recreation and Open Space Element of the Comprehensive Plan incorporates the public input, data, and results of the adopted City of McKinney Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan.

During the creation of the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan, critical park issues were identified through workshops, public meetings, user surveys, and focus groups. The purpose of the community meetings and user surveys was to obtain perceptions, opinions, and priorities from the citizens of McKinney about current and future parks and recreation needs. From this, the park standards were updated, a needs analysis including prioritization of those needs was prepared, and implementation techniques were developed. These standards, needs, and

techniques were incorporated into this section of the Comprehensive Plan. The Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan is typically updated every five years.

9.3 Park Types

Park sites and their facilities are classified in McKinney as neighborhood, community, special purpose, linear parks, greenbelts and hike and bike trails, regional parks, and natural areas and open space. The multi-purpose nature of these parks allows for a mixture of park facilities within each park as noted below.

Neighborhood Parks

Neighborhood parks are considered the primary focus of municipal park systems because they serve as the focal point of neighborhoods. Ideally, they provide amenities and recreation space for the entire family but are within easy walking or cycling distance of the people they serve.

The neighborhood park typically serves one large or several smaller neighborhoods. The standard size of a neighborhood park in McKinney is approximately 10 to 20 acres. Neighborhood parks should be accessible to residents who live within walking distance of the park. Ideally, neighborhood park facilities should be located within a ½ mile radius (or five to ten minute walk) of the residents who will use those facilities.

Neighborhood parks are generally located away from major arterial streets and provide easy access for the users that surround it. A neighborhood park should be accessible without having to cross major arterial streets.

Neighborhood parks are frequently located adjacent to elementary schools in order to share acquisition and development costs with the school district. Adjacencies of park and school grounds allow for joint use and sharing of facilities. It also lends itself to the community's involvement with the school grounds and vice versa, leading to a synergistic result that adds to the quality of life for everyone.

The spacing of the neighborhood parks is heavily influenced by the location of elementary schools. The residential future land use plan modules have been generally sized based on MISD target elementary school populations.

Typical facilities within a neighborhood park include:

- Playground equipment with adequate safety surfacing around the playground
- Unlighted basketball courts and half courts
- Active areas for unorganized play and practice fields
- Picnic areas with benches, picnic tables and cooking grills
- Shaded pavilions and gazebos
- Jogging and exercise trails
- Unlighted tennis courts
- Security lighting
- Drinking fountains

The overall design and layout of a neighborhood park is important to its final quality and timelessness. These parks should generally be designed with the programmed space – playgrounds, pavilions, basketball courts, etc. – clustered into an “activity zone” within the park. These areas need ample seating and shade to be hospitable

year round. Siting these areas near existing stands of trees is strongly recommended as this eliminates the years of waiting for shade trees to mature. The open / unprogrammed space should be visible from this activity area, but should be clearly delineated through plantings and hardscape features such as paved trails and seatwalls. Finally, a loop trail is today considered an essential component of a neighborhood park. It is important to design a neighborhood park that is unique in character, respond to the surrounding environment, and provide unique experiences for the park's users.

Parking for neighborhood parks will vary based on the size of the park, the facilities it contains, and the number of users. Opportunities to share parking may be beneficial to different yet compatible functions, such as libraries, schools, City buildings and the like.

The Community Park

Community parks are larger parks that serve a group of neighborhoods or a portion of the City. Community parks are usually reached by automobile, although residents adjacent to the park and trail users may walk or cycle to it, rendering them de facto neighborhood parks. A variety of recreational facilities are provided, including, in some cases, lighted playing fields for organized sports, hike and bike trails and sufficient parking to accommodate participants, spectators, and other park users.

There are two typical types of community parks – active and passive. Active community parks typically focus on high-intensity uses such as lighted competitive game fields, recreation centers, and manicured vegetation. Passive community parks, on the other hand, typically have low-intensity uses such as hiking, picnicking, and free play and generally have a large amount of natural and unprogrammed space in the park.

The typical community park should be large enough so it can provide a variety of amenities while still leaving open space for unstructured recreation, practice space, and natural areas. The park should also have room for expansion, as new facilities are required. The standard size of a community park in McKinney ranges from 40 to 100 acres in size, serving an area 2-3 miles in diameter.

Community parks should be located near a major thoroughfare to provide easy access from different parts of the City. Where possible, care should be taken to provide adequate buffers to adjacent residential streets, minimizing noise and bright lights at night (specifically important for active community parks). A good option to be considered is “cut-off” or “directional” lighting, which allows light patterns to be controlled, thereby avoiding undesired lighted areas. Because of the requirement for lighted facilities, it is often desirable to have active community parks located adjacent to commercial, retail, and/or light industrial areas, rather than residential neighborhoods.

Depending on community park type, facilities generally located in community parks may include:

- Playground equipment with adequate safety surfacing around the playground
- Active free play areas
- Picnic areas and pavilion(s)
- Unlighted practice fields for baseball, soccer, football, softball, etc.
- Restrooms
- Natural open space

- Jogging, bicycle and nature trails
- Lighted ball fields, suitable for organized competitive events
- Lighted multi-purpose practice fields
- Recreation center (if appropriate)
- Security lighting

Other facilities as needed which can take advantage of the unique characteristics of the site, such as nature trails or fishing adjacent to ponds, swimming pools, skateboard parks, amphitheaters and even community gardens.

Parking for a community park varies based on the facilities provided and the size of the park. Consideration should always be given towards the concept of “shared parking”, whereby parking may be shared with adjacent land uses such as schools, City facilities, etc.

Special Purpose Parks

Special purpose parks are designed to accommodate specialized recreational activities. Because the facility needs for each activity type are different, each special purpose park usually provides for one or a few activities. Examples of special purpose parks include:

- Golf courses
- Athletic fields or complexes
- Nature centers or large natural preserves
- Botanical Gardens/arboretums
- Swimming pool centers
- Aquatic Parks
- Pocket Parks
- Recreation Centers
- Senior Citizen Centers
- Tennis complexes
- Dog parks
- Skate parks/BMX tracks
- Cemeteries

Linear Parks, Greenbelts and Hike and Bike Trails

Linear parks and greenbelts are open park areas that generally follow some natural or man-made feature that is linear in nature, such as creeks, abandoned railroad rights-of-way or power line or utility corridor easements. Properly developed to facilitate pedestrian and bicycle travel, these parks can serve to link or connect other parks in the local system, as well as schools, libraries, and other major destinations. No specific standards apply to linear/linkage parks other than to be large enough to adequately accommodate the trail and provide a connection between each end. Linear parks can also serve as effective linear greenbelts, which preserve open space and provide trail connections along a natural or landscaped man made feature.

Hike and bike trails, often found in linear parks, serve to provide active and passive recreation as well as connections between parks and other destinations within the City. A trails system should be established to serve both recreation needs and as a means to alternative transportation choices and connections throughout the City. In a few instances, a typical off-street trail through a greenbelt is not a possibility due to lack of right-of-way or other constraints. In such instances, trails along streets within existing right-of-way are options for achieving a connected, city-wide trail

system. Such a system should provide each resident with quick and easy access to parks, schools, retail, and employment areas.

The Regional Park

Because of regional importance and relevance, regional parks serve the entire City of McKinney as well as other surrounding cities. This may be due to their natural characteristics including habitat, geological formations, and/or aesthetic beauty. Other reasons may be the role that a particular site plays in issues of regional importance such as historical memorial, habitat protection or ecological service (including water conservation and flood protection).

The size of a regional park can vary from less than one hundred acres to several thousand acres, depending on the purpose and character of the site. Regional parks are often under single ownership and under the control of county and state government. Major thoroughfares should be located adjacent to regional parks in order to accommodate the large number of visitors that may be expected to arrive by automobile.

Natural Areas and Open Space

The benefit and inclusion of places that are nature areas or un-programmed open space has been largely overlooked in the context of typical parks master plans. Conservation and preservation are especially valuable as, over time, natural resources disappear in our cities and natural habitat is wiped out. The value of walking through historic and natural places that have been left untouched is immeasurable. Such opportunities are rapidly becoming rare, and the identification and protection of such areas is urgently needed in most cities today. Cities that marshal the will and act quickly to conserve natural resources demonstrate the foresight and resolve necessary to ensure that future generations may enjoy something of beauty and timelessness.

Nature areas and open space are part of a city's resources and are its "natural gems." The value of such land may have visual, historic, and cultural appeal that imprints upon the visitor and creates a sense of place as well as of lasting memories. Wilderness, creeks, lakes, prairies, and particular geologic formations or topographic change may all be considered elements worthy of protection, public access, and celebration. As un-programmed space, there is the added benefit of these areas as "self-maintaining". There may be the occasional need to check for hazards, but maintenance is generally not a significant factor. Other than recreational and aesthetic opportunities afforded by natural areas, they also have huge economic value to society in terms of ecological services provided - functions like water and air purification, carbon sequestration, flood attenuation, pollination, air cooling, and positively effecting human health and well-being.

The East Fork of the Trinity River, Wilson Creek, Honey Creek, Rowlett Creek and all of their tributaries provide unique natural beauty and memorable recreation for the citizens of McKinney. The aesthetics and recreational value of natural water features available to the public is immeasurable. The protection of both riparian vegetation and habitat is essential to water quality and wild life diversity and ultimately to all citizens of McKinney.

Figure 9.1: Preservation Plan graphically depicts flood-prone land that possesses, to varying degrees, environmental, cultural, and/or visual assets worthy of acquisition and preservation. These high priority areas should be preserved through parkland dedication or easements, preserving the open space and

providing public access. The Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan is in full support of this vision and regards the Preservation Plan as a foundation for the protection of open space and natural areas in McKinney.

Other opportunities for open space land dedication include:

- Creek corridors that include a buffer area beyond the 100 year flood line depending on unique site features.
- Secondary tributary streams or swales that can create linkage “fingers” to adjacent neighborhoods by means of trail connections.
- Land identified as possessing natural and cultural importance including wetlands and their buffers; moderate and steep slopes; groundwater resources and their recharge areas; woodlands; heritage farmland; significant wildlife habitat; historic and archaeological features; and scenic view sheds.

9.4 Existing Conditions

Existing Parks and Recreational Facilities Systems

The City of McKinney Parks, Recreation and Open Space Department is responsible for the programming, maintenance, and planning for park and recreational services in McKinney, and provides most of the traditional public parks and recreational facilities. There are currently 47 park and recreational facilities including one recreation center, one community center, one municipal golf course, and two disc golf courses. The City also owns and operates the McKinney Senior Recreation Center, which includes an indoor swimming pool.

McKinney's park and open space system consists of six classifications: neighborhood parks, community parks, special purpose parks, linear parks, greenbelts and hike and bike trails, regional parks, and natural areas and open space.

9.5 Analysis

McKinney is situated in rolling terrain, primarily associated with two major floodplains, the East Fork of the Trinity River and Wilson Creek, and their tributaries, which comprise more than 11,000 acres.

The Comprehensive Plan identifies areas which are less suitable for development based on natural features, including the FEMA-designated 100-year floodplain, slopes greater than 15%, natural and urban tree cover, and certain soil types. Most of these prohibitive factors occur in conjunction along the 100-year floodplain.

In addition, the Comprehensive Plan identifies existing land use, zoning, and visual landmarks that may have an impact on future park locations to serve as natural scenic gateways. Taking advantage of the rolling terrain and natural beauty of McKinney's primary floodplains, the City's community and regional parks should be located primarily along the East Fork of the Trinity River and Wilson Creek.

Neighborhood parks should also take advantage of these natural resources when possible, but the primary purpose of these parks is to provide recreational opportunities within residential developments.

9.6 Land Standards by Park Type

Since 2003, the City has had an adopted target Level of Service (LOS) of 25 acres per 1,000 residents, which is significantly more than the regional average, and that recommended by the Collin County Open Space Plan (18 acres/1,000). This standard includes both floodplain and open space. This is also the same standard established by Texas Parks & Wildlife. The average standard for parkland in the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex is 11 acres per 1,000 residents

The Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan also follows the park acreage standards set forth by the NRPA (National Recreation and Parks Association).

The NRPA target standard for neighborhood parks is 1-2 acres per 1,000 population and for community parks, 5-8 acres per 1,000 population. More information on the City's parkland and recreational facilities can be found in Tables 6.1 and 6.2 of the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan.

McKinney's high standard reflects the determination of the City to preserve as much floodplain land as possible of the East Fork of the Trinity River, Honey Creek, and the Wilson Creek corridor for undeveloped open space. Both private and City-owned land could be preserved within the floodplain.

The acreage and facility standards contained in this section are reflective of the local needs, trends, National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) standards, demand levels in McKinney, comparative data from other Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex cities, and the experience and observations from a park planning and design consultant with emphasis primarily in north central Texas. More detail on these standards is found in the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan.

Standards and guidelines are useful criteria for quantifying the land and facility requirements of a parks and recreation system. However, these standards should be viewed as guidelines rather than rules. A City's park plan must reflect the unique needs and desires of the community in establishing any local standards and will likely undergo revision as the community builds out.

9.7 Future Parkland and Facility Needs

The Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan identifies a strong need to acquire parkland and recommends that a concerted, targeted and expedited effort be made toward this end. Acquisition of land should be focused on the provision of neighborhood parks, community parks, linear parks, special purpose parks, and the protection of habitat, cultural landscapes and open space. Desirable locations for parkland to be acquired are shown in the Existing & Proposed Community & Neighborhood Parks found in the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan.

Neighborhood Parks

About 35 new neighborhood parks are recommended for the entire City at build-out conditions. At a size of 10 to 20 acres per park, this constitutes an average of 525 acres to be acquired over the next 10 to 15 years and beyond. This will bring the City well into the target standard of 2 acres per 1,000 population at build-out. Recommendations for achieving this target are acquiring sites that are easily accessible and that have sufficient land that is useful for multi-purpose ball field development; continuing the practice of park dedication by developers as new communities are built; considering acquisition of land for neighborhood parks in conjunction with the school district's needs in order to ensure the development of

parcs and schools adjacent to each other; and where possible, acquiring land for neighborhood parks close to creeks in order to provide a trail connection along the creek to other parks and amenities.

Community Parks

Ten additional community parks are recommended at build-out conditions. At a size of 40 to 100 acres per park, this constitutes 400 to 1,000 acres to be acquired over the next 10 to 15 years and beyond. This will bring the City closer to the target standard of 2,325 acres or 6 acres per 1,000 population at build-out. Recommendations for achieving this target are acquiring lands that provide for the practical implementation of ball fields and multi-purpose fields outside of the floodplain for active sports use; acquiring lands within the floodplain for passive community parks; and acquiring land large enough to accommodate future growth in the parks.

Special Purpose Parks

Five types of special purpose parks are recommended:

- City portals – The City’s plan to develop 4 city portals to announce McKinney and their locations is largely based on the natural quality of the land in terms of topography, hydrology and habitat. These areas reinforce the City’s brand, Unique by Nature, by celebrating McKinney’s natural character and quality. The Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan recommends an additional portal along the City’s most northern edge along both sides of the future Regional Outer Loop. One of the main features of this proposed portal is a lake which has the length of about half a mile. From the lake the portal stretches to the east and southeast to include Honey Creek and its tributary.
- Trail heads – acquire about 14 areas for seven trail heads between 1 and 3 acres in size to accommodate parking, informational signage and trail gateways.
- Community gardens – identify appropriate land either in existing parks or future park sites considering quality of soil and access to water and irrigation.
- Habitat protection – the confluence of the East Fork of the Trinity River and Wilson Creek is located in the upper reaches of Lake Lavon. Acquire parkland on this beautiful peninsular area.

Land for Linear Parks

Linear parks are typically located adjacent to a linear landscape feature such as a creek and/or utility easement. If land is to be required for a trail only, the following guideline will be helpful to determine the need for land acquisition. A trail surface width of 12 feet within a 15 foot wide pedestrian easement constitutes 1.8 acres per mile.

Land and Easements for Trail Development

Trails are part of all parks and add connectivity to the parks system as a whole. The current City system should be expanded. The City’s Hike and Bike Trails Master Plan identifies future trails and connections that will enhance connectivity to parks, schools and neighborhoods as well as cultural landscapes and natural resources within the City. The trail network suggests connections to surrounding cities’ trails as well.

9.8 Hike and Bike Trail Master Plan

The hike and bike trail system for McKinney is planned to link neighborhood, community, linear and special purpose park sites with the City's three major creek and river corridors. The following tributaries support Wilson Creek: Gray Branch, Franklin Branch, Stover Creek, and Jean's Creek. Honey Creek joins in confluence with the East Fork of the Trinity River that has been dammed to form Lake Lavon located southeast of the City. The majority of the hike and bike trail system is planned to be constructed by developers linking their projects in the most efficient routing to the nearest creek or river corridor and school sites as depicted in Figure 9.2:Hike and Bike Trails Master Plan, which is considered the official Hike and Bike Trails Master Plan for the City.

9.9 Priorities, Phasing, Implementation

The priorities, phasing, and implementation of the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Element of the Comprehensive Plan is found in the adopted Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan. The Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan is scheduled for updating every five years, at which time these items can be re-evaluated and modified.

9.10 Inventory

The Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan contains an overview of the of the parks system in McKinney, listing the location, pictures and description of amenities that each park/facility contains. Please see Chapter 3 of the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan for more information.

9.11 Public School / Park Facilities

The City and area school districts consistently engage in cooperative school-park planning. Most new neighborhood parks are being built adjacent to new elementary schools allowing shared use of facilities common to both facilities. Many of the new schools use sustainable building design principles such as cisterns, windmills, vertical sundials, and "day-lighting" of classrooms, all of which make them interesting park neighbors and serve to remind park users and the community of vital environmental issues.

