

Parks

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beyond comparison

par·fait' (-fā') *n.* ice cream dessert in a tall glass

pa·ri'ah (-rī'ə) *n.* outcast

par'i·mu'tu·el (-chōō əl) *n.* racetrack betting in which winners share the total amount bet

par'ing (per'-) *n.* strip peeled off

par'ish *n.* 1 part of a diocese under a priest, etc. 2 church congregation

pa·rish'ion·er *n.* member of a parish

par'i·ty *n., pl. -ties* equality of value at a given ratio between moneys, commodities, etc.

park *n.* public land for recreation or rest —*v.* leave (a vehicle) temporarily

par'ka *n.* hooded coat

Par'kin·son's disease *n.* disease causing tremors

park'way' *n.* broad road lined with trees

par'lance *n.* mode of speech

par'lay *v.* 1 bet (wager plus winnings from one race, etc.) on another 2

KEEP OFF
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EXISTING CONDITIONS

One of the many benefits of living in Texas is that the weather is often complimentary to the ability to be outside barbecuing, fishing, playing sports, or just soaking up the sun. Residents across Laredo appreciate the opportunities for leisure and it is in these experiences that it becomes common to see the state motto of “friendship” finding its way into being a unifying element of the community.

Parks are intrinsic to the promotion and realization of a friendly community. These spaces provide the opportunity for the respite needed from the demands of busy work or school days by providing the backdrop for the many gatherings of family, friends, and neighbors. While parks allow us to socialize and recreate, they also provide many other benefits that are often overlooked. The other benefits of parks are:

Improvements to health

Recreational opportunities benefit a person’s physical and mental health. Exercise is a key component to physical health, while mental health is affected by social opportunities and the restorative effects of interactions with nature.

Opportunities for Involvement

Parks also provide an opportunity for community service. A neighborhood group can volunteer to maintain a specific park through an Adopt-A-Park program. Local citizens can become instructors for programs or coaches for athletic leagues. Special events and festivals hosted in local parks are great ways to get to know neighbors and local businesses.

Safe Places for Youth

Parks and recreation programs can have a positive social impact. Many neighborhood and community parks are programed to provide a safe and supervised environment for youth.

Increase Tourism

People will visit a community because of local attractions. This includes parks with desirable facilities or unique features. Festivals, concerts, sports tournaments, and other special events typically take place in community owned public spaces. These types of activities attract people from outside the local community providing trip spending which support local business and add tax revenues to local government coffers.

Contribute to the Economy

Parks have a positive impact on surrounding property values as home and business owners are willing to pay a premium to be adjacent to park land. This can be for increased proximity to nearby amenities or seeking entrepreneurial advantages of providing park visitors with complimentary services.

Protect the Natural Environment

Park space can provide needed protections through designating land to be set aside to preserve native plants and provide habitat for local wildlife. Additionally it can promote improved water quality by acting and keeping in place vegetative buffers to water bodies, sparing them from the impacts of nearby development.

A better understanding of the contributions to the local community by Laredo’s park system helps frame its existing role within the function of the local government.

Previous and Complimentary Park Planning Efforts

The following are a series of park planning efforts that directly impact the City's promotion of parks and recreation offerings.

Parks and Open Space Master Plan (2008)

This plan has provided the guidance for administration of the parks system since its adoption in 2008. The plan addressed many park planning related topics including: park development guidelines, park standards and classifications, establishment of a linear park system, the definition and identification of special use parks/facilities, and park improvement implementation strategies. These planning topics were framed by a series of planning goals and objectives that provided context for decisions affecting parks to meet the specific needs of the community of Laredo. Those goals are as follows:

- To provide a variety of recreation experiences that appeal to all segments of the population of Laredo.
- To enhance the physical attractiveness of Laredo by developing parks and open space amenities.
- To protect the natural resources of Laredo and Webb county by preserving those resources.
- Improve the quality of the urban environment by providing adequate parks and open space within the City of Laredo.
- Provide parks and open spaces that are safe for use by persons of all ages and abilities.
- Expand the range of recreation opportunities available to all age groups.
- Increase private sector involvement in developing and maintaining parks and open spaces.

The goals and polices developed as part of Viva Laredo provide foundational guidance to coming park planing efforts. Future park plans are expected to drill down and develop additional recommendations and implementation strategies for continued improvement and growth of the City's park system.

Rio Grande Vega Lands Master Plan (2008)

This plan serves as a long term guide (10-20 years) for two and a half miles of the Rio Grande riverfront. The plan identifies the establishment and build-out of an interconnected system of parks, greenways, and nature trails. The plan recommends a series of projects that promote recreation, economic development, ecotourism, and downtown revitalization. The intended result of the plan will be a unique environment that blends the natural features of the Rio Grande River into the fabric of the community while restoring and preserving its inherent ecological health.



Laredo 2020 (2011)

This plan is a master plan for the City of Laredo's downtown. The vision of the plan is that, "the downtown serves as the economic, civic, social and cultural center for Laredoans and revives its legacy as a Pan American destination for people and trade." The plan has a multifaceted approach to revitalizing the downtown which includes recommendations for land use, economic development, transportation, urban design, housing, and infrastructure, as well as plazas, parks, and open space. The plan references the Rio Grand Vega Lands Master Plan and identifies the plaza and parks in the downtown area as being vital components to the long range (50 year plan horizon) success of the downtown.

Organization of A Park System

The expectations for park systems are changing across the country and Laredo is not insulated from the shifting demands. Demand for access to park amenities often comes from the neighborhood level, but it is not always feasible for a city to duplicate park offerings at that scale. This is why it is important to establish the organizational framework to promote equity and clarity as to what citizens can expect in a park. This organization framework starts by classifying the different types of parks and park offerings, establishing how connectivity contributes to promoting park access, and a guiding approach for park system standards moving forward.

Park Classifications

Different parks types serve different geographic areas, functions, and users. Understanding this helps to identify gaps and overlap in the overall system and whether or not existing facilities are addressing the current park, recreation, and open space needs of the City. The 2008 Parks and Open Space Master Plan was the starting point for the following definitions of park classifications. These park classifications should be used to program parks with facilities as well as to gauge maintenance demands.

Mini Parks

These are small spaces and typically contain playgrounds geared to toddlers and young children. These parks are most often accessed by foot and parking is not provided. These facilities are most common in apartment complexes and residential subdivisions. In many cases, the provision of this park type is best left to private development.

Neighborhood Parks

These parks contain park facilities like playgrounds, basketball courts, picnic areas, walking trails, and on occasion a sports field or two. Neighborhood parks are expected to be within easy walking or bicycling distance to the neighborhoods, subdivisions, or developments they serve. They are the most prevalent type of municipal park and should not be located on busy thoroughfares. They are not intended to be a city-wide destination which would generate unwanted traffic to the neighborhood they inhabit. Street parking should meet most of the parking needs and local resident surveillance is the most common way to promote park safety. As these parks are typically located in neighborhoods, the programming of the park should not create unwanted nuisances.



Neighborhood and community parks make up a bulk of a park systems properties. It is important for these facilities to have high quality amenities that compliment particular user experiences. Picnic pavilions being located near playgrounds promote parks being used for family outings and birthday parties.

Community Parks

Community parks offer many of the same features of a neighborhood park, just on a larger scale, as they are intended to serve a group of neighborhoods or portion of a city. They are usually accessed by motor vehicle, but they may also be accessed by nearby residents by walking or biking. A variety of recreational facilities are provided within community parks including multiple sports fields (often lighted), connections to hike/bike trails, large playgrounds, swimming pools, etc. These parks require sufficient parking to accommodate participants, spectators, and other park users.

Metropolitan Parks

Metropolitan Parks are large park facilities that are intended to serve the entire city and in some instances several communities. These parks may contain urban elements as well as natural areas. They may host festivals, large sport complexes for hosting tournaments, entertainment venues, and multiple special use parks/facilities. When these parks are primarily located within a natural area, they can provide opportunities for boating, fishing, camping, hiking/biking trails, wildlife viewing, shooting sports and archery. There may be a series of internal roads and parking lots required to meet access demands. In some instances they will require special accommodations and connection to mass transit to help address parking and access limitation issues. The impact of additional traffic on areas surrounding large community or metropolitan parks should also be considered and addressed.

Regional Parks

Regional parks are very large parks which are intended to serve several communities or a region. Typically these types of parks are under the jurisdiction of the county, state, or federal government.

Civic Spaces

Size is not the key factor of the typical civic space, but rather the quality of the landscaping and other

design features which are more urban in character. Benches, fountains, formal landscaping, and other focal features are common items found in these civic spaces. These spaces are characterized by the frequencies of activity in the space and their propensity to host community gatherings. These spaces may take the form of squares, plazas, or greens (see pages 6.10 and 6.11 for further detail).

Special Use Parks/Facilities

A special use park is typically a space or facility that is developed to satisfy a specific intent or use. These parks may charge entrance fees and be structured with revenue-generating mechanisms and require staff to specifically oversee their operations. Examples include community centers, golf courses, aquatic facilities, stadiums, etc. Special use parks or facilities may be located in conjunction with a community park or a metropolitan park and in some instances a neighborhood park.

Linear Parks and Greenways

Linear parks and greenways are park land that connects larger tracts of open space together. This park land type is intended to promote swaths of green space throughout the city. It is appropriate that this type of park land is home to trails as it provides long stretches of uninterrupted travel.

Undeveloped Park Land

Undeveloped park land is property that has been acquired for future park development or as an open space set-aside. Having this classification of parkland allows for the City to reserve park land to search out partnerships with private sector development, buffer certain land uses, and protect environmentally sensitive areas. This land is set in reserve until funds become available or development patterns trigger its build-out.

Trails and Mobility

A multi-use trail system is an important component of a parks system, but it also serves as a link to improving community wide mobility through providing support to active transportation. The City has over 23 miles of trail system currently in the park system that can be integrated with an overall bicycle and pedestrian planning effort. Multi-use trails provide connections between parks and city residents, as well as providing linkages to other destinations within a community. Long term development of a city-wide trail system should be based upon the recommendations found in a City's Parks Master Plan and its Trails Master Plan.



Trail connections into residential areas will be an important part of a Trails Master Plan.

Park Standards

Park standards are an important component to ensuring equity of park and recreation offerings throughout the community. The 2008 Parks Master Plan provides an assessment of the different park classifications and their services area at a district level. This is an example of using park standards as a measure of equity between different parts of the city. Park standards establish levels of service (LOS) based on park acreage, park proximity, and park facility count. Park acreage and park facilities are typically measured in units per 1000 residents. Proximity is measured by distance and/or travel time. Using a travel time measure can assist in accounting for barriers that may impede access. The following table identifies the types of standards applicable to each park classification:

Park Classification	Acreage LOS	Proximity LOS	Facility LOS
Mini Park	No	No	No
Neighborhood Park	Yes	Yes	No
Community Park	Yes	Yes	No
Metropolitan Park	No	No	Yes
Regional Park	No	No	No
Special Use Park/Facility	No	Facility Specific	Yes
Linear Parks and Greenways	No	Yes	Yes
Undeveloped Park Land	Yes	Yes	No

The establishment of each respective LOS is to be done as part of the City's system-wide Parks Master Plan, as that effort provides the level of analysis and community involvement required by such an undertaking.

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

Offerings

Sports Complexes

Residents have stated the need for Laredo to better meet the demands of recreational and competitive sports leagues in hosting tournaments. This means the development of sport complexes that have the necessary number of facilities to host the various types of recreation leagues in the community. Recreation league presidents and representatives have stated that both an increase in the number of facilities and improvements to facility types is important, allowing Laredo to be on par with similar communities in Texas.

The location of sports complexes is not expected to be accomplished in a one-size-fits-all park. Residents expressed the desire for sports complexes to be spread around the City. Community members identified the efforts area school districts are making to meet demands of their respective students, but these facilities are not consistently available as they are operated to meet the needs of the school, with the general public being secondary in accommodation, if being accommodated at all.

It was recommended that a number of the older sports fields be redeveloped as parkland because they don't meet the recreation leagues' current needs. Residents expressed growing demands for youth sports, specifically tennis and baseball, but likely other youth sports like soccer, football, and softball will also need to be accommodated as part of new sports complexes.

Landscaping and Trees

Using parks as a means of City beautification was a common theme expressed by many members of the community. The improvements to landscaping and increased presence of trees throughout is seen as a way to make parks more inviting, promoting increased comfort levels while experiencing a park property. It is important to qualify that residents expressed the desire for improvements to landscaping city-wide as a way to beautify the City's appearance along city streets and within private development, specifically identifying parking lot enhancements through applications of

xeriscaping (landscaping with little to no water use and maintenance demands).

Public input consistently identified the need to increase the amount of plantings in City park land, focusing on extensive additions of new trees (but not more mesquite trees). Residents expressed their desires that the extent of the tree planting should range in size from saplings to mature trees. This approach would help address a specific concern directed towards the City of, "Why aren't we planting big trees?" Many residents made the connection to protecting existing trees and native landscaping as a means to preserve some of their region's inherent beauty.

A secondary theme of improving the City's appearance included the need to address the affects of litter in public spaces. Suggesting that the causes are part cultural and a lack of waste receptacles. Education programs aimed at changing mindsets and initiatives to reduce litter could help address this concern.

Expanding Trails and Linear Parks

Improving community connectivity through trails was identified by the community as something that City is currently doing that is popular. While the City has seen significant progress in the addition of the trails and linear park, continued emphasis by the City was identified as an important part of future park system development.

Residents would like the trail system to be complimented by bike lanes and other enhancements to the on-street pedestrian and bicycle networks. It is believed this would help increase safe routes to parks as well as connecting parks to other destinations throughout the City. This relates to topics raised in the Health Chapter on the need for increasing the City's walk-ability and accessibility.

Experiences

Parks to Promote Healthier Living

Parks have been identified by community residents as having a beneficial impact on the ability to live a more active and healthy life. Residents identified that parks and community recreation centers are the facilities that host the types of classes and clubs that help people get and stay motivated to be healthy. Residents identified that parks play an important role in providing children, elderly, and economically disadvantaged people the opportunities that help them make those types of lifestyle improvements.

Parks, specifically in more urban environments, can assist in providing increased dietary nutrition through access to fresh produce from community gardens. Community members have identified the desire for community gardens to be located in parks to provide opportunities for residents to be able to grow their own food.

Inclusive Accessible Spaces

Building upon the residents' stated desires for parks to providing opportunities for healthier and active lifestyles, they have also expressed the need for parks to be accommodating of all abilities. Residents are calling for parks to provide specific opportunities for people with special needs and to incorporate accessible principles throughout the park system that makes the parks more inclusive.

The desire for inclusiveness of the parks system has local citizens asking for the City to provide a range of facilities and activities in parks to meet the varying demands of a diverse population. This not only includes a variety of recreational offerings at parks, but asks that these recreational offerings target different age groups and skill levels. This would include providing recreational opportunities for youth that are outside the realm of organized sports, such as skate parks.



Community gardens are a type of addition to a park system that contribute to increases in both healthy living and expanded services to a more diverse group off Laredo residents.

STRATEGIES

Complimenting Land Uses and Public-Private Partnerships

Infill Development Demands

More and more cities are trying to react to market demands for land use regulation that allows for the creation of live-work centers. Developers are trying to maximize the buildout of residential dwelling units and retail, dining, and office space while trying to develop cost effective parking solutions and recoup the investment of the necessary infrastructure to support these live-work development projects. When these developments occur in infill or redevelopment scenarios, the increased up-front cost of these projects makes the utilization all of the existing property a vital necessity.

Cities have the opportunity to complement infill and redevelopment by partnering with developers to find mutually beneficial solutions where the requirements triggered by park land development ordinances can be addressed outside the traditional relationships associated with greenfield development. Simply put, existing nearby parkland may be able to accommodate the needs of these new residents, but upgrades to those park properties will be required to handle the demands of higher population concentrations.

Transfer of Park Land Development Requirements to Existing Parks

A city has the authority to establish the flexibility in its park land dedication and development fee ordinance to meet the emerging development demands of urbanization. The ability to use exactions from redevelopment to retrofit nearby existing park land is appropriate if it can meet the constitutional standard of “rational nexus” through the municipality demonstrating that the park serves residents of the subdivision subject to the exaction.¹

A city’s ability to apply these exactions at a scale

1 Fletcher, J.E., Kaiser, R.A. & Groger, S. (1992). An assessment of the importance and performance of park impact fees in funding park and recreation infrastructure. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration* 10(3), 73-87.

larger than neighborhood parks is important to being able to help fund the types of contributions and range of recreational offerings found within community parks and metropolitan parks. The resulting increases in population densities from infill and redevelopment projects will rely on a city’s ability to confidently apply these exactions for the access, acquisition and development of larger parks.

“The rational nexus test for parks and recreation can be expanded beyond the neighborhood park to community and regional parks where additional user pressures will occur and additional park and recreation capacity will be needed.”²

2 Mertes, J.D. & Hall, J.R. (1995). *Park, recreation, open space and greenway guidelines*. Ashburn, VA: National Recreation Park Association



Adding parks in urban areas can be complex, such as Klyde Warren Park which capped a freeway and added much needed green space to downtown Dallas. These types of park additions are often expensive, but creating flexibility in park land dedication requirements can help provide resources needed to accomplish similar projects.

Proximity Measures

Location, Location, Location

Acreage standards for park development will continue to play an important role in guiding the land acquisition and build-out of a park system. A city would be significantly more successful in meeting recreation demands for access and equity goals by increasing the role proximity standards play in determining locations and need for respective park classifications. Locating future parks of larger acreages in close proximity to land uses that result in higher population density should be a guiding principle for land use decisions. In instances where assembling park land near existing high population areas is not feasible, emphasizing bicycle and pedestrian connection to large tracts of park land should be a priority. Park land proximity evaluations will use level of service standards as metrics for location and population density analysis as a means of quantitative assessments.

Increased Access, Increase Park Offerings

It is not uncommon for Cities to meet the provisions of acreage level of service standards while still possessing a community perception of a lack of park land. While this phenomena can be partly explained by large community or metropolitan parks skewing acreage totals, its more likely explained by parks relying too heavily on motorized transportation as a means of access. Connecting a series of neighborhood parks or a group of subdivisions to a larger community park via an off-street trail will have a positive impact on the perceived prevalence in park land throughout a community. Additionally focusing on safe off-street connections to parks will help improve access for youth and other groups of the population without the means of a personal automobile.



The image above is a Pedestrian Shed Study from the Laredo 2020 plan and it shows a 5 minute walking distance (1/4 miles) from town or neighborhood centers. This is the type of analysis that would depict park proximity measures for park land location analysis.

Maintaining Laredo's Park System

Conservation

Park management practices should hold fast to the concepts of conservation as they promote the highest and best use within reason of affordability and long term feasibility. Proper practices and approaches to storm water runoff reduce flooding, prioritize clean water, and promote wise use of resources. The identification or set aside of park land and open space is complementary to the buildout of a city. Passive recreation activities such as hiking and wildlife viewing brings the conservation of open space into the realm of protecting environmentally sensitive or unique areas that are valued additions to a park system, without the intense maintenance requirements of other recreational choices.



"Conservation means the wise use of the earth and its resources for the lasting good of men."
~ Gifford Pinchot

Increase Native Plantings

The use of native plantings and reclamation approaches have the potential to provide mutually beneficial relationships of lower maintenance costs and opportunities for passive recreation. This approach is geared to providing wildlife viewing opportunities and bucolic aesthetics along walking or biking trails.

Communities are engaging in habitat restoration by casually or directly converting previously unprogrammed land into nature preserves. Nature preserve, or designated natural areas, are now becoming integral components of municipal park systems. Casual restoration of park land into small areas of natural vegetation or wildlife habitat simply refers to allowing the land to remain fallow. As the land repairs itself, non-native invasive grasses, shrubs, and trees, are gradually replaced by native species.

Communicating Beauty

Park systems require the necessary upkeep and care to remain an aesthetic addition to the built environment. They often require an increased approach in public education on the maintenance demands and resource cost to maintain these manicured spaces. Arborist, horticulturists, and turf grass specialist are valued members of a parks system staff and each plays a distinct role in a functional park system. These members of a parks department staff provide the knowledge and expertise to maintain a dynamic and functional park system; they have the potential to provide a valuable role in educating the general public on the demands of a park system.

Outreach efforts geared to the general public about the maintenance practices exercised daily, seasonally, and annually basis can more appropriately align expectations with the realities of maintaining a park system. This can result in communities understanding and anticipating park management practices related to water conservation, the needs of maintaining a healthy and resilient urban forest, and the promotion of year round botanical interest within parks. This is typically accomplished through the posting of informational signs within parks and making educational material available on city websites. These efforts can have the potential to change critics of the park system to informed advocates.

Equity in Parks

Accessibility

The initial development of park properties in the Laredo parks system occurred before the passing of the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. These ADA requirements have paved the way for increased consideration and inclusion of accessibility standards in the design of the built environment. Park design has implemented these accessibility principles into design approaches for almost 30 years. Though these principles have become common place, it is still important for the City to be vigilant in the implementation of accessible park and facility design. Manufacturers of play equipment integrate a variety of accessible and inclusive play principles into their products, and the City will have the opportunity to capitalize on this in future additions to all park properties.

Making parks accessible and inclusive is a significant responsibility that cities are assigned. It is important to communicate, educate, and promote these additions to park and park facilities to the general public. Providing a comprehensive listing of park features that contribute to accessibility and promote inclusive play can serve both as a reference tool for local citizens and a measuring stick for the City.



Playground facilities have made significant strides in promoting inclusive design concepts. The City should highlight these additions when adding new equipment. Photo courtesy of Play for All, www.playitsafeparkgrounds.com.

District or Park Zones

The 2008 Parks Master Plan identifies park land and park facility deficiencies at the district level. This approach is important to ensure equal provision of parks and recreation opportunities in each respective part of the community. It is recommended to continue this approach moving forward with the caveat that park districts or park zones be established through an apolitical means. Having park zones deviate from council districts will reduce the potential competition between districts over park funds and facilities. There are components of the park system that are intended to serve the entire community, and it is important for elected officials to work together in their role of implementing these future park additions.

Establishing parks zones based on a combination of factors like population served, maintenance hours required, physical or natural boundaries, and other local considerations may be important to streamlining park development and administration to better serve the community. Whatever is decided, park zones should ultimately be developed to help promote the equitable offering of recreation opportunities and park amenities for residents of Laredo.

GOALS & POLICIES

Overall Goal

Laredo will have an extraordinary parks system that is valued by the communities it serves and one that strives to address the recreational demands of all of Laredo's Citizens.

Park Development

Goal 8.1: Develop future park land and add improvements to the existing park system to meet the needs of the residents of Laredo.

Policy 8.1.1: The City shall strive to create extraordinary parks that express the natural beauty and cultural diversity of Laredo; the City will fund the park system at a level that corresponds to its significance and importance to Laredo residents.

Policy 8.1.2: The City will provide a balanced parks system with a variety of park sizes and facilities, including trails, open spaces, and indoor recreation facilities.

Policy 8.1.3: The city will continue to update, and implement the parks master plan to refine strategies for oversight and development of park land. This plan should meet with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department guidelines to ensure grant fund eligibility. As such, it is recommended that the City continue with the plan structure of a 10 year plan timeframe, with a subsequent 5 year update.

Policy 8.1.4: The City should continue with its park land dedication requirements. The City should routinely review and update regulations as necessary to ensure that park land dedication ordinances complement development impacts.

Policy 8.1.5: Create partnerships for the future success of the park system, involving every governmental entity, the school systems, the county, and the state. Recreational facilities at schools should be integrated into the Laredo parks system for the mutual benefit of schools and the community.

Policy 8.1.6: Formalize any relationships with school districts or other groups where land is being integrated into the park system, as this will strengthen the ability of utilizing grant funding for park improvements.

Policy 8.1.7: Create task forces as part of the next parks planning effort to evaluate and provide recommendations for sports complexes to meet the respective needs for hosting different athletic tournaments.

Policy 8.1.8: Establish mechanisms that allow for the collection of park land development fees for the build-out of metropolitan parks. These can be used to help implement the recommendations found in the Rio Grande Vega Lands Master Plan, as this is a park that will benefit all residents of the City of Laredo.

Policy 8.1.9: The City should consider the inclusion of a staff landscape architect within the Parks and Leisure Services Department to oversee the design, drainage, and use of parks, park ponds, and drainage facilities throughout the City. The goal of the landscape architect should be parks and park facilities that are artful, recreational, and functional.

Policy 8.1.10: Facilitate the conversion of undeveloped land such as drainage easements, vacant lots, and areas prone to flooding adjacent to both new and existing neighborhoods that lack nearby parks.

Policy 8.1.11: Collaborate with home owner associations to advance the goals and policies of the plan.

Policy 8.1.12: Promote the use of the Rio Grande River for recreation purposes by development of public river access facilities, such as docks and boat ramps.

Park Access

Goal 8.2: Ensure that residents have access to recreational opportunities through the equitable distribution of park land and open space.

Policy 8.2.1: Increase the application of proximity level of service standards for each respective park classification as deemed appropriate.

Policy 8.2.2: Acquire parcels for the assembly of interconnected greenways as a way to increase community access to open space.

Policy 8.2.3: Promote community garden programs as means to increase park offerings in economically disadvantaged areas. This may include acquisition of small tracts of land to accommodate garden plots.

Goal 8.3: Promote parks that provide offerings and accommodations for persons of all ages and abilities.

Policy 8.3.1: Ensure that new park facilities and renovations meet accessibility requirements. Identify ways to include a variety of sensory engagement offerings into park design to make parks more inclusive. Communicate and develop reference materials so the general public is educated on the opportunities that exist.

Policy 8.3.2: Emphasize ways to accommodate park facilities, programs, and recreation opportunities for youth with an emphasis on teens, specifically outside the realm of organized sports. Skateparks are an example of this type of facility.

Policy 8.3.3: Create an aquatic facilities plan to increase the overall access to water based recreation. This includes a strategy to meet any facility levels of service standards for splash parks, community swimming pools, and aquatic centers/water parks.

Policy 8.3.4: Encourage cross department dialogue as a means to promote the use of parks for hosting city and community wide events. With established fee mechanisms, this can create a source of revenue and may encourage visits from residents who don't typically use parks for recreation purposes.

Goal 8.4: Ensure parks are safe and comfortable environments for all park users.

Policy 8.4.1: Continue with the application of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, as identified in the 2008 Parks Master Plan.

Policy 8.4.2: Identify and evaluate potential hazards in the park system. Develop a plan to systematically reduce or remove their threat and review and update annually.

Policy 8.4.3: In upcoming park planning efforts, evaluate the need for increased shade in area parks, as well as the need for system wide lighting standards and an implementation program.

Trails, Linear Parks, and Greenways

Goal 8.5: Increase park connectivity, recreation offerings, and bicycle and pedestrian networks through the development of a Trails Master Plan.

Policy 8.5.1: Develop a Trails Master Plan for the City, including the ETJ as part of the planning area. Work with Webb County to identify opportunities for collaboration.

Policy 8.5.2: The Trails Master Plan should not only connect existing parks and open space to residential areas but be integrated into other bicycle and pedestrian planning efforts. This should encourage and promote connections to key destinations, like schools.

Policy 8.5.3: Modify park land dedication ordinance to include trail system dedication requirements to correspond with the design criteria for shared-use paths.

Policy 8.5.4: Define “proximity” criteria in the trail system dedication requirements for purposes of creating a City Trail System Fund for the implementation of trail projects. Amend development regulations to provide connections to existing and proposed trails found in a Trails Master Plan. Tailor so that a maximum number of Laredo residents have close proximity to parks and trails.

Policy 8.5.6: Adopt design standards for multi-use trails building upon the trail classes established in the 2008 Parks Master Plan.

Maintaining Parks

Goal 8.6: Strive for the efficient use of City resources while promoting aesthetically pleasing and functional parks and park facilities.

Policy 8.6.1: Continually refine maintenance approaches to reflect the current industry-wide best management practices. This includes establishing practices for routine tasks, nutrient management plans, mowing guidelines, integrated pest management, facility upkeep, and landscaping and tree pruning guidelines.

Policy 8.6.2: Identify parks that require a disproportionate amount of hours for maintenance and solicit ways from staff to reduce those demands. This includes looking at parks where only one or two sports fields are located and assessing if they should be repurposed.

Policy 8.6.3: Establish a water conservation program that includes a variety of methods for irrigation reduction, including acreage irrigated reductions and infrastructure that allows for more efficient applications. This may include identifying areas for xeriscape and native plantings in both neighborhood and community parks.

Policy 8.6.4: Promote park maintenance and conservation approaches as part of a community wide education effort. Focus on changing the way citizens view parks as manicured lawns to a more dynamic part of the built environment and natural ecosystem.

Policy 8.6.5: Develop a tree planting program to increase tree diversity geared to creating a more resilient urban forest and larger tree canopy in City parks. A tree planting program should include the addition of larger caliper trees, not just saplings. It would be appropriate to complement this tree planting program with a strategy to preserve existing trees.

Policy 8.6.6: Identify standards and approaches where park land and other open space can integrate storm water detention facility into a network of green spaces.

Policy 8.6.7: Create multi-faceted strategies for maintaining an increase in smaller and more dispersed parks by requiring the use of lower maintenance native vegetation, more durable materials, and promote the public care and vigilance of the facilities through good urban design which faces home fronts toward neighborhood parks. Restructuring city budget to account for added maintenance should also be considered.