

# PARK, RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE MASTER PLAN

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

January 2015

Parks, open space, and recreational opportunities are important, not only to enhance quality of life and neighborhood vitality, but also to preserve natural resources and provide alternative transportation links between our neighborhoods and growth centers. The City of Fort Worth Parks and Community Services Department (PACS) has prepared this 2015 Park, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan to provide guidance to the City in its management and development of parkland and recreational facilities.

Since the last Master Plan report was adopted in 2004 and the updated plan was adopted in 2010 the city has continued to see environmental, economic and demographic conditions play an important role in park development. According to the most recent U.S. Census Bureau data, Fort Worth was the fastest growing large city of more than 500,000 population in the nation between April 1, 2000 and April 10, 2010. Since 2010, Fort Worth's growth rate has slowed compared with the rapid growth of the 2000's and is more in line with growth experience in the 1990's.

Fort Worth continues to be recognized for its outstanding quality of life and is currently ranked as one of the nation's top 10 most livable cities by Partners for Livable Communities. In addition, Fort Worth has also topped several other list rankings and received many accolades, some of which include:

- Downtown Fort Worth is No. 1 on Top 10 Best Downtowns according to *Livability.com*. (2014)
- *Forbes Magazine* ranked Fort Worth No. 3 on its list of "Best Cities for Job Seekers." (2013)
- Fort Worth ranks No. 6 on the list of "Fastest Growing Cities since the Recession" by *Forbes Magazine*. (2013)
- Fort Worth is the top Texas City for job growth and No. 4 in the U.S. according to *NewGeography.com*. (2013)
- Fort Worth is the No. 1 Big City for Home Ownership among the 25 most populous cities in the U.S. according to *nerdwallet.com*. (2013)

In the fall of 2010, *BestPlaces.net*, rated Fort Worth No. 4 on its "Best Cities to Relocate to in America" list. They noted Fort Worth's budding arts and culture scene, botanical garden, amazing zoo, as well as its proximity to major league sports, including the Texas Rangers and Dallas Cowboys. One of the inescapable variables in choosing a place to live and work is cost of living. Fort Worth's cost of living is nearly 14 percent below the national average.

Fort Worth has experienced significant economic challenges since the 2008 nationwide economic downturn. According to a November 2012 report by the Brookings Institution, a

Washington, D.C. think tank, the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex has now fully recovered from the nationwide economic downturn, primarily due to growth in the financial and energy sectors. The unemployment rate in Fort Worth in 2014 was 5.3 percent which is below the national average of 6.2 percent. In 2014, job growth in Fort Worth increased by 2.98 percent. Fort Worth has maintained a thriving and diverse business environment helping it to become a major center for industry, technology, distribution and transportation.

The City of Fort Worth continues to set processes in place to provide an excellent quality of life for its citizens. Understanding our changing environment, economic opportunities and evolving demographics gives us the ability to plan a park system for the future. This Park, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan has been an effort guided by the Parks and Community Services Advisory Board, public input, the Fort Worth City Council, City staff and established national standards.

The development of this plan reflects on the past, measures the present and charts the activities for the next five to ten years to continue to enhance one of the best park systems in the State of Texas and the nation. The Parks and Community Services Department continues to build on the direction established in previous plans: George Kessler's Plan - 1909, Hare and Hare's Master Plans - 1930 and 1957, the 1992 Park and Recreation Department Strategic Plan, the 1998 and 2004 Park, Recreation & Open Space Master Plans and the 2010 Park, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan update. This master plan continues the rich legacy of the park system identifies areas of improvements and key opportunities and develops strategies to address existing deficiencies.

The Park, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan uses a comprehensive approach to setting goals and objectives that respond to the changing demands and values of our city. The following six goals for the Department are as follows:

1. Restore and maintain the viability of the park, recreation and open space system by investing and re-investing in existing facilities.
2. Provide new parkland and facilities to meet park, recreation and open space needs in developing and re-developing areas of the City.
3. Improve the variety of park, recreation and open space opportunities available to the community.
4. Expand recreational opportunities in the floodplains of the Trinity River and its tributaries.
5. Build and enhance community partnerships to deliver quality services and facilities.
6. Preserve and enhance the City's natural, historical and cultural developed resources.

With goals and objectives set, the plan development process begins by employing a systems approach to create a framework for park planning. This approach includes the use of citizen input and needs assessment tools, adherence to the City's overall vision for community enhancement, and an understanding of department goals, objectives, and strategies.

One of the significant instruments used in the development of this Master Plan was the 2013 Needs Assessment Study. The City employed National Service Research (NSR) of Fort Worth, a full service research firm, to carry out the 2013 Needs Assessment process. The research process included a mailed survey instrument to 20,000 households randomly chosen within each of the eight Council Districts in direct proportion to the population within each district.

Major findings of the 2013 Needs Assessment Study included the following:

- More than half of respondents rated the existing park system as good or excellent.
- City-wide, the most frequently used facilities were 1) parks, 2) hike/bike/walk trails, 3) playgrounds, 4) Botanic Gardens and 5) fields for organized sports.
- More than 40% of respondents are willing to pay MORE for renovation of existing parks, increased maintenance of parks and trails and land acquisition for trails and trail connections.
- A majority of users feel very safe or safe when utilizing parks, community centers, the Trinity Trail and various types of athletic facilities. Less than 10% reported they feel unsafe.
- Almost equal numbers of respondents would prefer Fort Worth PACSD to develop more parks and increase tax levels OR develop fewer parks and maintain tax levels.

Standards were established on a local basis for various amenities and facilities. This means that the service standard is a "needs based, facilities driven, and land measured" means of identifying deficiencies and opportunities in the park system. This process allowed for the development of specific criteria that could both generate explicit recommendations and provide a statistical basis for determining the priorities of the plan recommendations.

As Fort Worth is a large city and continues to grow in population and geographic area, it follows that while some areas of the City are experiencing new development, other areas of the City are redeveloping. Facility standards and levels of service provide a framework for park development, but it is important to recognize that priorities in one area of the City may not mirror another area. Therefore, the City has been divided into five Park Planning Districts (PPDs). The PPDs were derived from the physical characteristics of the City based on: major roadways, and topographic features that serve as the boundaries.

The comprehensive nature of this Master Plan addresses the planning and development priorities of the Fort Worth park system for the next five to ten years. The priorities and recommendations for each Park Planning District can be reviewed in Section VII - Plan Implementation and Prioritization of Needs. The priorities listing is followed by the 5-year work plan which includes projects that are currently funded, and are scheduled to be initiated and completed within the next 5 years. While the work plan will address some of the current and projected needs, the objective for the next 5 years – years 2020-2025 – will be to address those priorities that show a deficiency.

This City of Fort Worth 2015 Park, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan acts as a guide for allocation of resources for the next five to ten years as identified by the citizens of Fort Worth, the Parks and Community Services Advisory Board, the Fort Worth City Council and City staff.