

Section I: Introduction

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Overview

Parks, open space, and recreational opportunities are essential, not only to enhance quality of life and neighborhood vitality, but also to preserve natural resources and provide alternative transportation links between neighborhoods, business districts and other destinations. The Fort Worth Parks and Community Services Department (Department) has 268 parks to meet the needs of a population of nearly 842,500 (according to North Central Texas Council of Government's estimate for 2015). Additionally, millions of out of town visitors including tourists, workers and athletic teams visit our parks annually.

As the Department seeks to obtain more outside funding for capital improvements, renovations, operations and maintenance, it is imperative that a comprehensive Park, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan be in place which establishes the City's priorities for the distribution of limited resources. In order to effectively plan our future system of parks and open spaces, it is necessary to examine the planning and development history of the parks system. This brief history and an examination of current local, regional, national and global trends will serve as the basis for the continued evolution of a vision for Fort Worth parks, open spaces and recreation areas.

This section includes a brief history of the master planning of park facilities in the City of Fort Worth, and describes the process for developing the 2015 Park, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan (Master Plan).

History of Park Master Planning

Cotton, cattle drives and the eventual arrival of the railway in 1876 served as the economic engines that drove Fort Worth's early growth. During this time, the streetcar and railroad systems were primary determinants in the acquisition and development of parks. Parks were used as anchors at the ends of transit lines to ensure ridership of the transit system. This strategy is evident in the parkway plans prepared by George E. Kessler (a prominent landscape architect credited with the early park planning and design in many mid-western and western cities) and the park development that follows his planning efforts.

“The general experience in American cities, all of which are actively engaged in this work, make it superfluous to submit any argument to show the need for establishing public recreation grounds. They have all found such improvements in all its elements absolutely necessary to the life and growth of their communities, and in no measure a luxury.”

George E. Kessler, September 15, 1909, in the description of Fort Worth's first Park Master Plan

The intent and spirit of Kessler's original Park Plan for the City of Fort Worth served as the basis for the implementation of major park facilities that now serve as the core of Fort Worth's park, recreation and open space system. Kessler's initial vision for Fort Worth parks was an integrated system of parks based on the natural drainage ways of the City's rivers, and a system of parkways or boulevards tying together the park system, the residential sections and the business district.

Kessler was closely associated with the firm of Hare and Hare, landscape architects of Kansas City, Missouri who later assumed many of Kessler's city and park planning clients, providing advice to the Parks Board and beginning a study of the Fort Worth park system in 1925. That study and consultation resulted in the 1930 plan called A Comprehensive Parks System for Fort Worth, Texas.

The 1930 park system plan by Hare and Hare addressed continued population growth and the completion of bond improvements. The plan was needed to address the growth which had occurred up to the 1920s and guided the development of park facilities through the Great Depression, the Second World War and the Baby Boom growth period of the early and mid-1950s. These parks master plans created a vision for parks within the City of Fort Worth, and established the core of the present day park system.

In 1992, the plan development process took a systems approach. The process included public input in various forms, adherence to the City's overall vision for community enhancement, and identification of corresponding goals, objectives and strategies. This systems approach has been used in all subsequent plans.

Since 1998, the City's population has undergone density shifts spurred by increased residential development and redevelopment activities. Annexations of large tracts of land in the north and northwest increased the land area of the corporate city limits and increased residential development in those areas. These changes have been reflected in recent plans.

Throughout the history of the development of the park system in Fort Worth, the Department has effectively anticipated and responded to the park, recreation and open space needs of the community. The important historic legacy provided by planning initiatives of the first park board, many City Councils, George Kessler, the firm of Hare and Hare, citizens, foundations, and public service associations have not been lost. The community acting together anticipated or responded to rapidly developing trends to ensure that the park system evolved to the award winning level that exists today.

Many parks and facilities in the current system owe their existence to the generosity of individual citizens, citizen groups and foundations. Foundations such as the Amon G. Carter Foundation, the Anne Burnett and Charles Tandy Foundation, the Sid W. Richardson Foundation, and the Communities Foundation of Texas have made significant contributions of time, land, and money to the evolution of the city and the park system. Citizen groups such as Streams and Valleys, Inc., the Fort Worth Zoological Association, the Fort Worth Botanical Society, the Fort Worth Garden Club, the Texas Garden Clubs Association, the Junior League of Fort Worth, the Friends of the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge, the Rotary Club of Fort Worth and many neighborhood associations and other non-profits associations have also made significant contributions. Without the generosity of these groups, major destination facilities such as the Water Gardens, Burnett Park, Heritage Park, the Botanic Garden, the Nature Center & Refuge, Gateway Park and the Fort Worth Zoo would not exist. Private giving has been a tradition of the citizens of the City of Fort Worth since the Jennings donation of Hyde Park circa 1873.

Use of This Master Plan

This document includes the following sections:

- II) Goals and Objectives** – All activities of the Parks and Community Services Department are guided by the directives provided in the Department’s Strategic Plan. The initiatives recommended by this master plan are rooted in understanding the issues identified by the Strategic Plan and by striving to achieve the goals and objectives that address those issues.
- III) Plan Development Process** – This section describes the methods used by the Parks and Community Services Department in the development of this master plan, including a description of the public input process.
- IV) Trends** – This section includes a listing of trends that will impact the future development and management of Fort Worth’s parks, recreation and open spaces.
- V) Area and Facility Concepts and Standards** – This section describes the park and open space standards developed for the Department based on the standards endorsed by the National Recreation and Park Association and the American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration. It also identifies classes of facilities required to meet the demands of the citizens.
- VI) Inventory of Areas and Facilities** – This section provides an inventory of existing parks, community centers, school and other agency facilities used through joint agreements, and identifies potential opportunities for park, recreation and open space facilities.
- VII) Plan Implementation and Prioritization of Needs** – This section identifies priorities for plan implementation, listing these priorities by Park Planning Districts (PPD). Additionally, this section includes the five (5) year work plan for each PPD.