

# CHAPTER 6: PARKS AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

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. Over the years, the City of Fort Worth has recognized these benefits and has strived to increase these opportunities, earning the State Gold Medal in 1992, 1994, 2001, and 2005 from the Texas Recreation and Park Society for having the best managed large park system in the state, as well as earning the National Gold Medal in 1996 for having the best managed large park system in the United States.

The City of Fort Worth provides park and recreational opportunities through the Parks and Community Services Department (PACS), whose mission is “to enrich the lives of our citizens through the stewardship of our resources and the responsive provision of quality recreational opportunities and community services.” In June 2004, the City Council adopted a Park, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan, and in February 2010 approved a resolution updating the Master Plan.

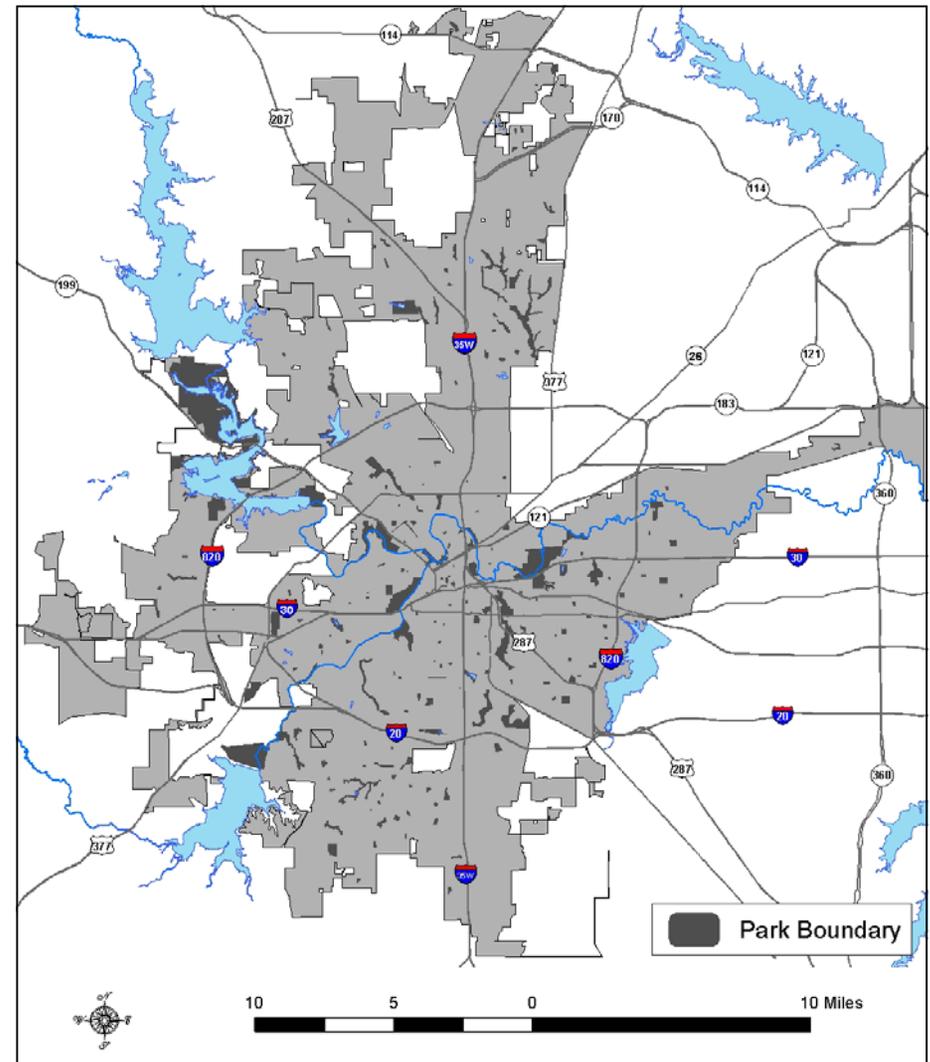
## EXISTING CONDITIONS AND TRENDS

Fort Worth has 260 parks, which make up 5.3% percent of the total land area within the city limits. The park sites totaling 11,648 acres include 178 playgrounds, 105 practice fields, 46 competition baseball/softball fields, 33 competition soccer fields, 109 basketball courts, 98 tennis courts, 7 pools (currently closed), 5 golf courses (99 holes), approximately 70 miles of trails, and 111 picnic shelters.

### Park Classifications

Fort Worth’s park and recreational sites are grouped into four classifications, based on the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) standards that use size, service area, and uses as distinguishing characteristics. The four park classifications are Neighborhood, Community, Large Recreation, and Special Use Park. These classifications and standards assist the City in evaluating the current park system and in planning for future sites and facilities. In 2011, there were 191 neighborhood parks, 31 community parks, 7 large recreation parks, and 29 special use parks. The four park classifications are grouped into two types of parkland. Large recreation and the larger special use parks, including golf courses and the Nature Center, are considered Regional parkland. Smaller special use parks such as urban parks/plazas, neighborhood parks and community parks are considered close-to-home parkland. The City standard for all parkland including regional as adopted in the Park, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan is 21.25 acres per 1,000 persons, which is based on NRPA standards for parkland. The greatest deficiency is in Regional parkland, though there is also a need for additional Close-to-Home parkland. 4,210.20 acres of parkland will need to be acquired by 2025 to meet the 21.25 acres of dark land standard. In order to provide adequate close-to-home parkland the City Council adopted the Neighborhood and Community Park Dedication policy in April 2000, and revised it in 2009. The purpose of the policy is to ensure adequate neighborhood and community park acreage.

Existing Park Sites



Fort Worth has 260 parks with 11,648 acres of parkland. (Source: Parks and Community Services Department, 2011.)

**Recreational Facilities**

Recreational facilities provided at park sites offer an important service to the surrounding areas. Neighborhood parks are typically within walking distance of residential areas. Generally, they include playgrounds and picnic areas, non-structured open space, and provisions for informal field and court games, such as softball or soccer. Community parks include similar facilities, though more formal fields for organized sports are generally provided. Some also have athletic field lighting, depending on site characteristics and surrounding land uses. Large recreation parks often have space set aside for natural areas. They also include facilities similar to those in community parks, along with more intense uses such as tennis centers, swimming pools, and community centers to serve the larger regional population. Special use parks are oriented towards a particular use and are intended to serve the entire city. Many have a regional draw. The Fort Worth Nature Center and Refuge, Botanic Garden, golf courses, Log Cabin Village, and the Fort Worth Zoo are examples.

The NRPA standards for park and recreational facilities use population size to determine the number of recreation facilities needed to serve a community. Based on these standards, Fort Worth needs an additional 7 playgrounds, 4 miles of hike/bike trails, and 16 competition softball/baseball fields as of 2011.

**Community Centers**

The City operates a total of 22 community centers that serve multiple functions for the community within a 1 1/2 to 3-mile radius service area. Regional facilities include the Haws Athletic Center, located near Downtown adjacent to the Police and Fire Training Center, Bertha Collins Sports Center, Botanic Garden, Fort Worth Nature Center and Refuge, and the Log Cabin Village.

The services administered by PACS are divided into two categories: recreation programs and community-based programs. Recreation programs include sports programs and leagues, individual recreation opportunities such as weight training, and Zumba, life skills programs, cultural and social programs such as Van Cliburn concerts, performance poetry, dance, and programs for seniors including ceramics, quilting, exercise, and daily lunches. Community-based programs include a variety of crime prevention programs, social and neighborhood services programs, educational workshops, special nutrition services which include county-wide summer food programs, Kids Café, afterschool snacks and weekend backpack snack program, homework assistance, and health and child care services. Many of the community centers are also used for meeting spaces by homeowners associations, neighborhood advisory councils, youth organizations, special event rentals and some serve as emergency shelters and designated safe havens for children.

Social services are provided through the countywide Community Action Partners program (CAP) sites at seven Fort Worth community centers, and two neighborhood offices located outside the city limits. CAP receives Community Services Block Grant funds and Comprehensive Energy Assistance funds which provide case management, utility, and emergency rental assistance to individuals and families that meet the income guidelines. Additional programs include holiday assistance, energy

**Fort Worth’s Recreation Facility Needs, Based on Local and National Recreation and Park Association Standards**

Facility	Standard per 1,000 population	Required Facilities	Existing Facilities	Needed Facilities
Playgrounds	1:4	185	178	7
Hike/Bike Trails	1:10	74	66	4
Competition Soccer Fields	1:10	74	33	41
Competition Softball/ Baseball Fields	1:12	62	46	16

Fort Worth uses the National Recreation and Park Association standards for recreational facilities as a basis for determining the City’s facility needs. A five-year plan has been developed to address deficiencies. (Source: Parks and Community Services Department, 2011.)

**National Recreation and Park Association Standards for Park Classifications**

Classification	Acres	Service Area (Radius Miles)	Service Population
Neighborhood	5 to 20	¼ to ½	3,000 to 6,000
Community	30 to 75	1 to 1 ½	18,000 to 36,000
Large Recreation	≥ 75	2 to 4	80,000 to 100,000
Special Use	Depends on Use	City	City

Fort Worth uses the park classification and standards listed above to determine size and location of parks and to evaluate the park system. Fort Worth has 191 neighborhood parks, 31 community parks, 7 large recreation parks, and 29 special use parks. (Source: Parks and Community Services Department, 2009.)

conservation, and money management education.

### **Trinity River Vision**

The Trinity River Master Plan was initiated by Streams and Valleys, Inc., in 1990 and updated under the name of the Tilley Plan in 1999. The Master Plan recommended improvement of 43 miles of the Trinity River Corridor along the Clear Fork and the West Fork. The plan emphasized the importance of using the river corridors to connect parks and lakes, activity centers, and neighborhoods. The plan recognized the importance of connecting the river system and the urban landscape by providing well marked and convenient entrances to the system from many points in the City. Recreational activity is an important part of the plan. Recommendations were made for canoe runs, access points, and trails for walking, bicycling, and horseback riding. An agreement between the City and Tarrant Regional Water District provides for shared responsibility for maintenance and expansion of the greenway network.

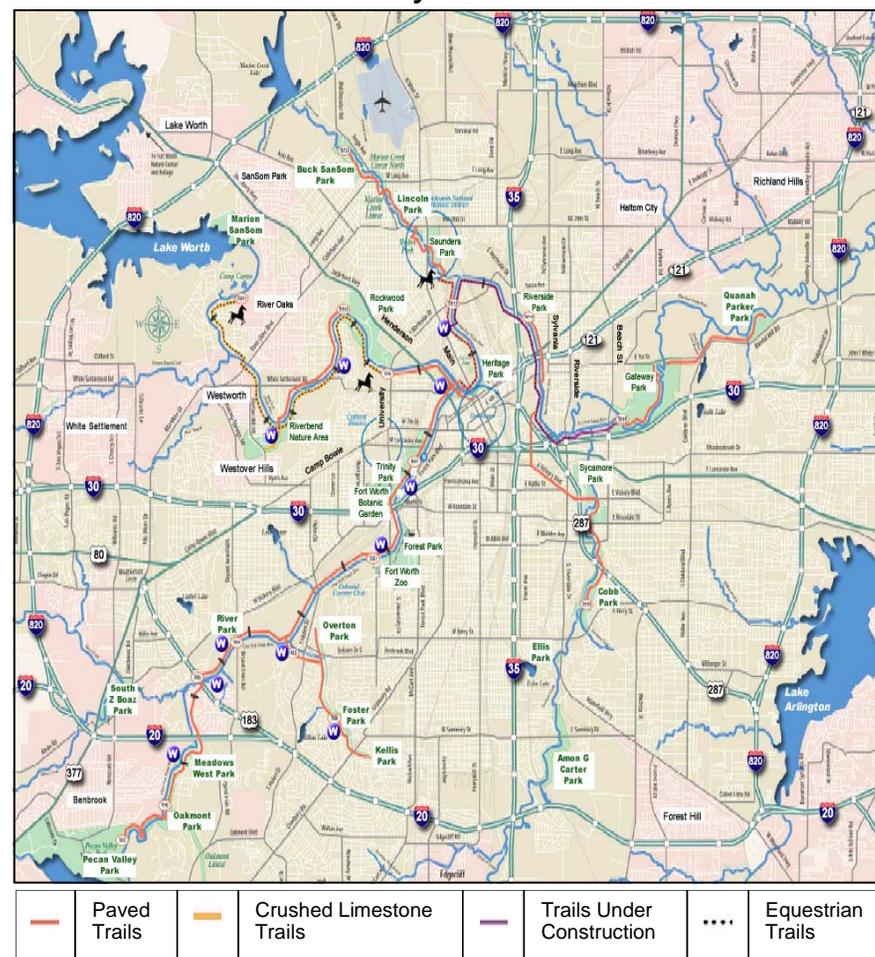
The City Council adopted a far-sighted update of this plan, the Trinity River Vision Master Plan, in 2003. It has an enlarged scope that encompasses approximately 88 miles of river and creek corridor. Along with expanding on the existing Master Plan recommendations, it contains recommendations to improve the river’s accessibility to the public; to attract more people to its banks; to develop an urbanized Downtown waterfront while maintaining the natural character of the more remote areas; and to increase awareness of its presence and beauty by citizens and visitors. The plan identifies opportunities for conservation, linkages, and open space. The primary goals include improving adjoining land uses and enhancing environmental quality and flood control. The proposed Downtown waterfront, known as Trinity Uptown, is also discussed in Chapter 14: Urban Design.

### **Trinity River Trails**

Nearly 40 miles of surfaced trails exist along the Trinity River and Marine Creek. The trails are within the floodplain of the Trinity River and its tributaries. Surfaces are provided for biking, walking, in-line skating, and horseback riding. These green belts are important, not only for protecting the Trinity River and its floodplains and providing accessible recreation and open space opportunities, but also for providing alternative transportation routes between neighborhoods and activity and employment centers.

The Clear Fork of the Trinity River connects south and southwest neighborhoods to Downtown, and also links major parks, such as Pecan Valley Park and Golf Course, Oakmont Park, Forest Park, Trinity Park, and Heritage Park. Expansion of the greenway system along the Clear Fork to Lake Benbrook was completed in November 1999. The West Fork of the Trinity River provides an opportunity for linking Lake Worth to Downtown, and for connecting many west and northwest neighborhoods to the City park system. The 2010 Lake Worth Vision Plan calls for the Trinity River Trail system to be extended to Lake Worth and to connect to a new bike and pedestrian trail around much of the lake. East of I-35W, the Trinity River will also provide linkages from Downtown to neighborhoods in east Fort Worth and eventually to Arlington and the eastern portion of the regional trail system.

### **Trinity River Trails**



Connections to adjacent neighborhoods and parks are very important to revitalizing the Trinity River. The *Trinity River Vision Master Plan* proposes many strategically placed linkages to allow easy access to the river from almost anywhere in the City. (Source: *Trinity River Vision Master Plan*, 2003.)



### **Nature Center and Refuge**

In June 2003, the City Council adopted a master plan to improve and enhance facilities at the Fort Worth Nature Center and Refuge. The mission of the plan is to promote a signature heritage that reflects not only the regional character of Fort Worth and North Central Texas, but communicates Fort Worth's community values of preserving natural open space for future generations. The Nature Center and Refuge Master Plan includes a clear analysis of the local and regional market for visitors, compares the Nature Center to other similar facilities that may be used as benchmarks for improving the Nature Center, and includes recommendations for resource management practices, land use management, operations, governance, and economic growth. The Master Plan also includes recommendations for new facilities, the update of existing facilities, interpretive exhibits, and needed supporting infrastructure. The Master Plan also identifies needed capital improvements in the amount of \$64.6 million over a forty-year period with a majority of this funding to be raised from private and community sources. In November 2005, the City Council approved the establishment of user fees for the nature center that went into effect on April 1, 2006.

### **Trends**

Fort Worth grew 39 percent in the past decade, with an increase of 15,950 just in the past year. If Fort Worth continues to grow at the same rate it has since 2000, the city's population could easily exceed one million people by the year 2030. This growth will consume large areas of currently undeveloped land. As population increases, additional demand will be placed on existing parks and recreational facilities. New facilities and open spaces will be needed to serve the additional population. Much of the growth is expected to occur in the Far North, Far Northwest, Far South, Far Southwest and Far West sectors.

Fort Worth is committed to central city revitalization. The Downtown area is experiencing high density residential development and commercial redevelopment, which has placed a strain on existing urban parkland and created a demand for more urban park space and links to river corridor recreational opportunities. Growth centers and urban villages, with their increased density, will require recreation and open space opportunities, as well as links to rivers, lakes, and other activity centers. Urban parks and public plazas will play an important role in these urbanized areas, similar to the role that Heritage Park, Burnett Park, Hyde Park, and the Water Gardens play in Downtown.

### **Tourism**

Fort Worth's parks are attractions for both residents and visitors alike. Many of the City's premier park attractions, such as the Zoo, Botanic Garden, Nature Center and Refuge, and Log Cabin Village are important to the Fort Worth economy. For example, the Zoo alone attracts approximately one million visitors annually. In the 2007 Needs Assessment Survey, the majority of park users responded that they had taken out-of-town visitors to the Fort Worth Zoo, Botanic Garden, and Trinity Park.

To plan for the future of the Botanic Garden, the City Council adopted the Botanic Garden Master Plan in 2010. The Master Plan identifies a long-range vision,

### **Fort Worth Nature Center and Refuge**



The Fort Worth Nature Center and Refuge comprises over one-third of all the park system in Fort Worth, and at over 3,600 acres, it is one of the largest city-owned nature centers in the United States. (Source: Parks and Community Services Department, 2009.)

### **Percentage of Park Users that Take Out-of-Town Visitors to Park Attractions**

<b>Parks Visited</b>	<b>Percentage of Park Users</b>
Fort Worth Zoo	77
Botanic Garden	74
Trinity Park	56
Water Gardens	54
Other Fort Worth Parks	43

Of the 600 park users who were surveyed for the Master Plan Update, 77 percent reported taking out-of-town visitors to the Fort Worth Zoo. (Source: Parks and Community Services Department, 2011.)

determines future uses and activities, and projects grounds and facilities improvements for the Botanic Garden. The Garden is owned and operated by the City of Fort Worth. The operational budget is included in the Parks and Community Services Department. Through the years, many other organizations and individuals have assisted with substantial improvements and additions. These organizations include the Fort Worth Garden Club, the Fort Worth Botanical Society, and more recently, the Botanical Research Institute of Texas (BRIT). Individuals, families and foundations have contributed funding to several major Garden features. Alliances and partnerships with the Texas Garden Club, colleges and universities, area school districts, the Texas AgriLife Extension, and others are also ongoing. The Fort Worth Botanical Society Endowment Fund has been established to benefit the Fort Worth Botanic Garden. Gifts are invested to provide income for general operating support to the areas of the Garden where the need is the greatest.

As the Fort Worth economy continues to diversify and surrounding markets remain highly competitive, the value of the City's premier park facilities may be an important factor in business relocation decisions.

### **Parkland Acquisition**

In April 2000 the City Council responded to concerns over population growth outpacing and overburdening the City's park resources by adopting a revised Neighborhood and Community Park Dedication Policy. Based on the national standard, the policy requires dedication of parkland at a rate of 2.5 acres per 1,000 population for neighborhood parks (or fee in-lieu-of dedication), and dedication of land for community parks at a rate of 3.75 acres per 1,000 population (or fee in-lieu-of dedication). The policy also requires that developers construct or provide the funding for construction of first phase improvements for neighborhood parks as a project cost, with the City committing to appropriate maintenance funds once the improvements are completed and accepted by the City. A revision of this policy in December 2000 allows credit for private recreational facilities that will meet the recreational needs of the population served by the private development.

In 2004, the Neighborhood and Community Park Dedication Policy was revised to address the increasing density within the central city. Designated by the City Council, the central city is generally defined as the area inside Loop 820. All new residential development within this area was assessed a flat fee of \$500 per additional residential unit. This action strengthens the City's park grant applications for the central city and Trinity River Corridor by providing a dedicated source of local match dollars.

In 2009, the Neighborhood and Community Park Dedication Policy was amended to redefine Park Planning District 4 as a fixed boundary to include all areas encompassed by Loop 820 with a flat fee of \$500 per residential unit to be paid prior to the issuance of a building permit. The amendment also authorized the use of community park fees collected within a community park unit to be expended within the park planning district where the community park unit is located or adjacent to the park planning district based on a percentage of service area.

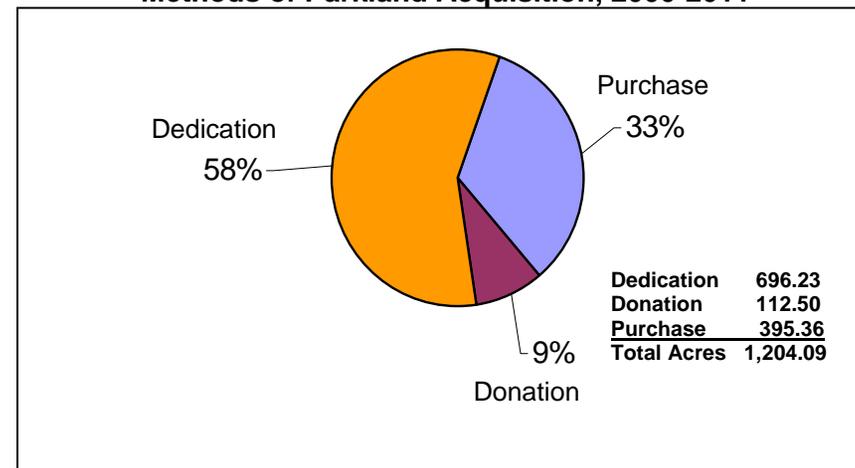
Land dedication (typically through the subdivision process) is the City's principal

### **Fort Worth Botanic Garden**



The Fort Worth Botanic Garden. (Source: Parks and Community Services Department, 2011.)

### **Methods of Parkland Acquisition, 2000-2011**



The 2000 Neighborhood and Community Park Dedication Policy has provided for the acquisition of a considerable amount of parkland through dedication, donation and purchase over the past eleven years. (Source: Parks and Community Services Department, 2011.)

tool for obtaining parkland. Private donations and joint use agreements are another means of obtaining parkland. The City is exploring more joint use agreements with the ISDs that serve Fort Worth. In addition, PACS reviews City-owned surplus property before it is auctioned to the public. In the past two years, 167.4 acres of surplus property have been identified as suitable for additional parkland. Many of these parcels are located in built-out central city areas where land acquisition at fair market value is difficult and costly. A proactive acquisition strategy of purchase and set aside, coupled with park dedication requirements for residential developers, serves both to protect our natural resources and to provide land for recreation activities for future generations.

## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Restore and maintain the viability of the park, recreation, and open space system by renovating existing facilities.

- Renovate existing playgrounds to bring them into compliance with Consumer Product Safety Guidelines, and continue a program to replace or renovate playgrounds on a 20-year cycle.
- Renovate or replace segments of existing trails on an annual basis to ensure the safety of our customers who use these facilities.
- Provide first-phase development of reserve parks acquired through the Neighborhood and Community Park Dedication Policy when neighborhood units reach 50 percent build-out or a population of 2,000 or greater and when funds are appropriated to develop and maintain the improvements.

- Complete a physical assessment of Heritage Plaza in 2012.

Provide new parkland and facilities to meet park, recreation, and open space needs in developing areas of the City.

- Increase neighborhood and community park acreage from 5.11 acres per 1,000 persons to 6.25 acres per 1,000 by 2025, concentrating on under-served areas throughout the city.
- Review the effectiveness of, and seek amendments to, policies and procedures in the acquisition, development, and management of parkland and community facilities in 2012.

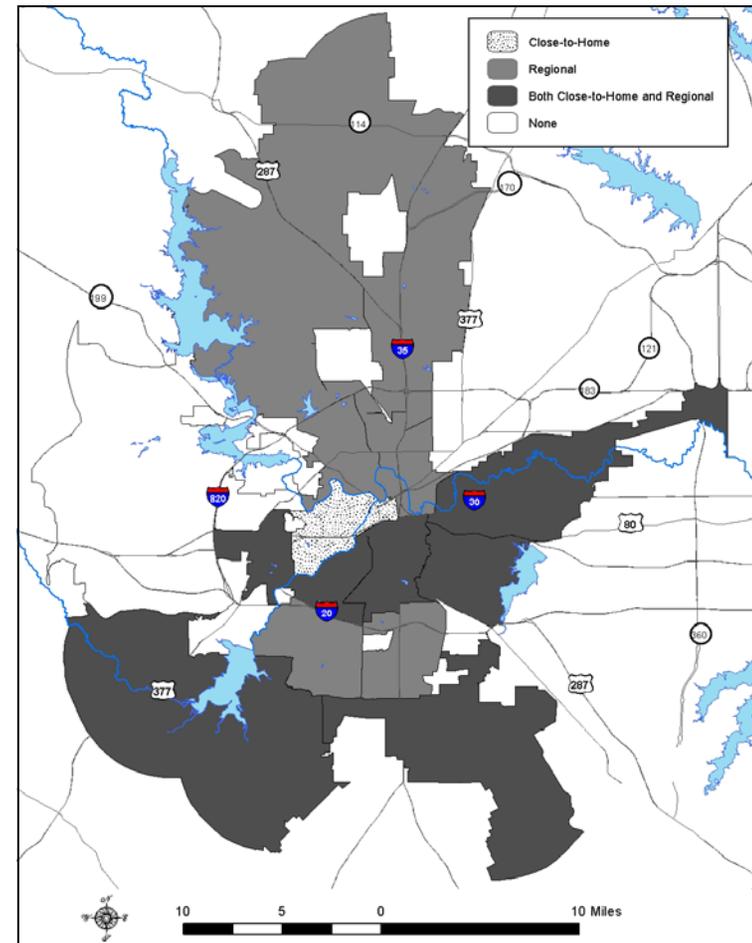
Improve the variety of park, recreation, and open space opportunities available to the community.

- Provide new park facilities where service levels fall below standards, including playgrounds, trails, and competition fields by the end of 2025.
- Reinvest in and update infrastructure to ensure adequate resources are in place to meet service levels.

Provide a comprehensive golf program through a municipal enterprise fund that is self-supporting from user fees.

- Obtain financial stability through the Golf Enterprise Fund.
- Enhance the game of golf by effectively promoting a variety of instructional programs targeted to new and existing golfers.
- Provide competitive events and leagues for all golfers.

## Sectors Deficient in Parkland



Sectors Deficient in Close-to-Home Parkland Only	Sectors Deficient in Regional Parkland Only	Sectors Deficient in Both Close-to-Home and Regional Parkland
Arlington Heights	Far North	Eastside
Downtown	Far Northwest	Far South
	Northeast	Far Southwest
	Northside	Southeast
	Sycamore	Southside
	Wedgwood	TCU/Wescliff
		Western Hills/Ridglea

The map and table depict sectors deficient in parkland according to City and national standards. (Source: Parks and Community Services Department, 2011.)

Expand recreational opportunities in the floodplains of the Trinity River and its tributaries.

- Continue cooperative efforts with Streams and Valleys, Inc., the Tarrant Regional Water District, the North Central Texas Council of Governments, and partner municipalities.
- Complete Trinity Trail segment east to Loop 820 by the end of 2020.
- Expand the trail system to include southern sections of Sycamore Creek to the southern end of Carter Park and Lincolnshire Park by 2020.
- Build Trinity Trail connection between Loop 820 and Arlington by 2020.
- Work with bordering municipalities and Tarrant County to connect Arcadia Trail to Trinity Trail in the White's Branch and Fossil Creek Corridor by 2020.
- Extend the Trinity Trails System to Lake Worth in accordance with the 2011 Lake Worth Vision Plan, and develop trail connections to the Fort Worth Nature Center and other destinations around Lake Worth.

Build and enhance community partnerships to deliver quality services and facilities.

- Each year, build partnerships with willing Independent School Districts (ISDs), other governmental entities, and non-profit agencies serving the City of Fort Worth to pursue cooperative use of facilities in the delivery of recreation and community programs and services.

Preserve and enhance the City's natural, historical, and developed resources.

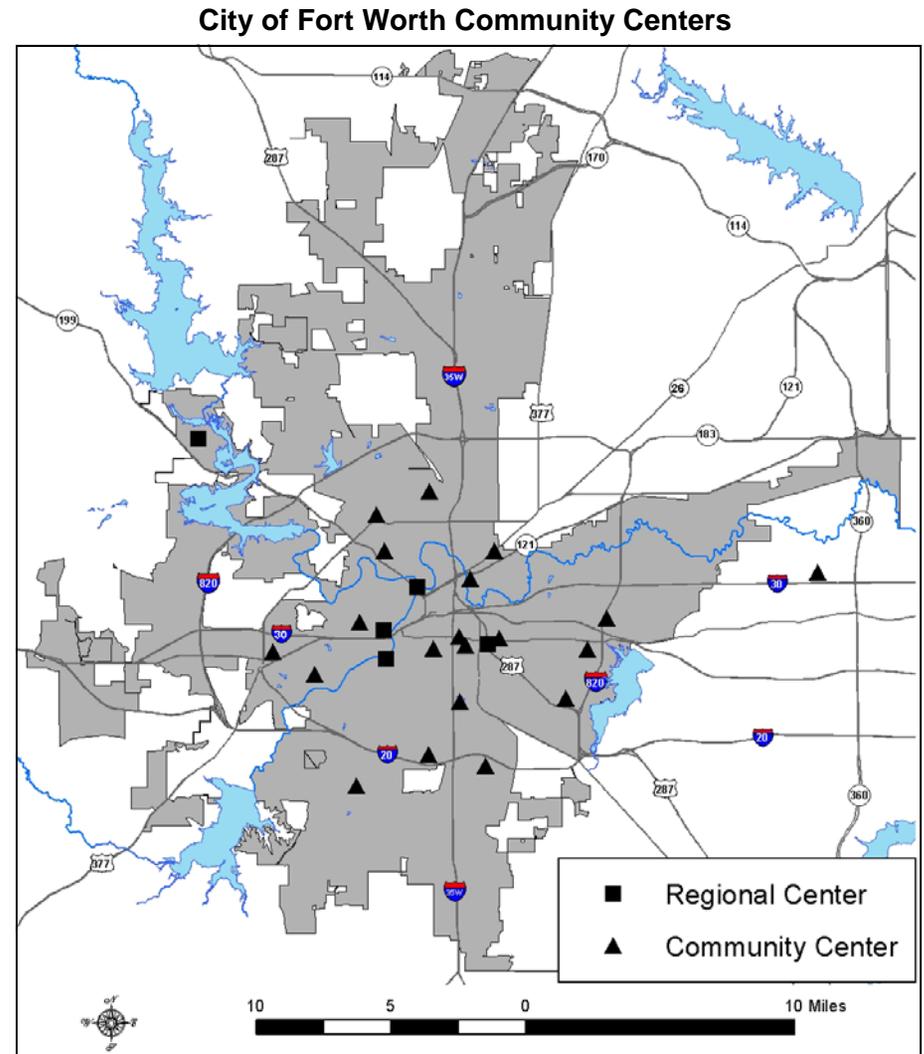
- Develop a plan that identifies, conserves, and recognizes historical, archeological, and cultural resources within the existing park system by the end of 2025.

## POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

The City of Fort Worth will use the policies outlined in the Park, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan and the Trinity River Vision Master Plan to provide park, open space, and recreational opportunities to its citizens.

### Policies

- Work with local, state, and federal organizations to provide coordinated community services and a City park system that is effectively managed and conserves and protects City resources.
- Develop attractive and secure park, recreation, open space, and community service facilities that are accessible to all citizens, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, age, income, sexual orientation, or physical ability.
- Actively promote citizen involvement in determining park, recreation, and open space needs and desires of the community.
- Provide parkland in areas of the City that are currently deficient.
- Seek the means to develop and support a system of urban parks and open space that link neighborhoods to growth centers, as well as other park, recreation, and community facilities.
- Pursue implementation of the Trinity River Vision Master Plan in cooperation with Streams and Valleys, Inc., the Tarrant Regional Water District, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.



The City of Fort Worth has a total of 19 community centers that have a 1 1/2 to 3 mile radius service area. The Botanic Garden, Fort Worth Nature Center & Wildlife Refuge, Haws Athletic Center, Bertha Collins Sports Center, and the Log Cabin Village are regional facilities that serve the entire city. (Source: Parks and Community Services Department, 2011.)

## Strategies

- Seek grants and other non-City funding resources for riparian buffer conservation, park development, including bike trail linkages and other projects.
- Recognize the importance of urban parks and plazas to the success of central city redevelopment efforts, and to the creation of attractive and vibrant transit-oriented development areas, and support development of urban parks and plazas in these areas.
- Support implementation of the park, trail, and open space recommendations of the Lake Worth Vision Plan.
- Annually review services which may be handled by other agencies or groups without adversely affecting service levels.
- Improve and enhance the role Fort Worth's significant park facilities play in tourism and educational opportunities.

## **PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS**

### Programs

- PACS works with the Independent School Districts to avoid duplication of park and recreational facilities. The City has shared facility agreements for many park sites, athletic facilities, educational facilities and services, and transportation.
- Many recreational, educational and cultural programs are offered at the City's community centers, including out-of-school programs, martial arts, dance, gymnastics, fitness/wellness classes, and Senior programs provided by Tarrant County College or Senior Citizen Services of Greater Tarrant County; life skills programs such as junior golf, arts and crafts, cooking, and wood carving; and youth sports programs and athletic leagues. Volunteer opportunities for community service workers and employment opportunities for summer leaders and contract instructors are also available.
- PACS also offers a number of programs referred to as "Crime Prevention Programs." These programs include the Afterschool Evening/Late Night Program, Comin' Up Gang Intervention Program, Youth Sports Program, and Homework Assistance Center.
- Formal and informal educational opportunities are available at the Nature Center and Refuge, Log Cabin Village, Fort Worth Zoo and the Botanic Garden.

### Capital Improvement Projects

The City of Fort Worth has a number of projects that will provide park, open space, and recreational opportunities for its residents. Additional projects will be necessary over the next 20 years to serve the needs of the growing population in developing areas and to rebuild an aging central city parks infrastructure. The capital projects identified for the next 20 years are listed in Appendices D and E.

### Key Near-Term Parks and Community Services Objectives

- Complete a physical assessment of Heritage Plaza in 2012.
- Extend the Trinity Trails System to Lake Worth in accordance with the 2011 Lake Worth Vision Plan, and develop trail connections to the Fort Worth Nature Center and other destinations around Lake Worth.
- Each year, build partnerships with willing Independent School Districts (ISDs), other governmental entities, and non-profit agencies serving the City of Fort Worth to pursue cooperative use of facilities in the delivery of recreation and community programs and services.
- Review the effectiveness of, and seek amendments to, policies and procedures in the acquisition, development, and management of parkland and community facilities in 2012.



Rolling Hills Park, located in southeast Fort Worth, is 197 acres. It is considered a large recreation park, with 11 competition soccer fields, 4 soccer practice fields, 6 tennis courts, 1 competition softball/baseball field, and 1 practice field. A number of sports tournaments make use of the facilities throughout the year. (Source: Parks and Community Services Department, 2011.)