

PARKS, GREENWAYS & THE ARTS



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Parks, greenways, and the arts play an integral role in improving quality of life for the residents of College Station. They foster social, environmental, economic, and health benefits by uniting families, building cultural diversity, promoting stewardship of natural resources, attracting businesses, and offering places for a healthy lifestyle. Parks and greenways create a sense of place and frame neighborhoods into unique spaces to be enjoyed and explored. Performing and fine arts provide opportunities for entertainment, education and culture.



The City of College Station offers its residents a wide variety of recreation and leisure experiences in locations across the community.

When College Station residents were asked as a part of the comprehensive planning process to rank enhancements that would make College Station a better place to live and work, more parks, greenways, and entertainment were among the top choices. Also ranking high with respect to needs and desires for the community, were environmental protection, parks and recreation facilities, drainage and flooding concerns, and community image and appearance. Residents view parks, greenways, and the arts as necessities in College Station.

Parks, greenways, and the arts improve the character and livability of a city and warrant a significant level of attention and commitment of resources. Planning and investing in these assets is expected and appreciated by current residents, business owners and visitors.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this chapter is to recognize and ensure the continued protection and enhancement of leisure and recreation opportunities available to the residents of College Station through parks, greenways and the arts. College Station enjoys a diverse and educated population which supports and celebrates this vital component of local quality of life. In addition, the City recognizes the value of the natural environment and its effects upon the physical and mental health of its residents.

Another important function of this chapter is to set the framework for the City's parks and recreation system and greenways program for the next two decades. The City's Recreation, Park, and Open Space Master Plan was last updated and approved by City Council in 2011. The Bicycle, Pedestrian and Greenway Master Plan was adopted in 2010. This chapter ensures consistency and coordination with these two plans as they are updated.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The City of College Station currently has over 1,305 acres of parkland and 500 acres of greenway that allow for active and passive recreation. They are classified as follows and displayed in **Map 5.1, Parks and Greenways**.

- Mini Parks – 7
- Neighborhood Parks – 34
- Community Parks – 8
- Regional Parks – 2 (Lick Creek Nature Park and Veterans Athletic Park)
- Special – 2 (Arboretum, Conference Center)
- Cemeteries – 2 (not included in total acreage above)
- Greenways trails – 3 miles of paved trails

College Station currently provides a wide variety of facilities and programs within these parks. Facilities available include athletic fields and courts, pavilions, playgrounds, pools and trails. Other facilities include a recreation center, teen center and soon to be built skate park. Programs range from aquatics to sports for youth and adults as well as special events. From swim lessons, athletic leagues, and afterschool care through Kids Klub, to education classes through XTRA Education and entertainment with the Starlight Music Series.

Demographics

Growth and changing demographic trends are important components in determining the development of parks, greenways and the arts. College Station has an average annual rate of 3% and is projected to increase by approximately 40,000 people by 2030 for a total of over 134,000 residents. An increase in population creates a need for a greater number and diversity of programs and facilities to maintain current levels of service. Although school and college-aged residents will continue to make up a large portion of the population, residents of retirement age are the fastest growing demographic. This may present a need for more passive recreation opportunities in the future in a system currently geared towards more active recreation.

Needs Assessment

A combination of standards-based, demand-based, and resource-based approaches are used to assess the need for additional parks, recreation facilities, and greenways within College Station.

The standards-based approach relies on the City's goal to achieve 7 acres of parkland per 1,000 citizens (3.5 acres for neighborhood parks and 3.5 acres for community parks per 1,000). **Table 5.1, Neighborhood and Community Parkland Needs (2009)**, displays acreages for the

The Parks and Recreation Advisory Board has established a policy not to develop mini parks under five acres in the future. Limited use and effectiveness of parcels less than five acres does not justify the costs associated with their maintenance and operations.

current parkland needs (based on population) within College Station. The potential need for additional parkland acreage to satisfy current and future demands is determined by applying the recommended standards to the current and future population of the City.

As Table 5.1, shows, based on a 2009 population of 91,009 persons (as estimated by the City's Planning & Development Services Department), College Station should have a total parkland supply of 637.06 acres. The City currently maintains 623.06 acres of parkland (regional parks are not included in this benchmark comparison). Therefore, based on the parkland acreage available to the community today, the City has a deficiency of 14 acres. The major challenge for the City will be to maintain the current acreage in the park system while obtaining and developing sufficient land to keep pace with the future population growth in the community. **Table 5.2** shows the recommended parkland supply necessary to support the City's projected 2030 population of 134,772 persons. Based on this population projection and the existing inventory of City owned parks, College Station's current parkland acreage is insufficient to meet the 2030 acreage target. The total acreage needed to support the projected population is 943.40 acres, compared to 623.06 current acres. Therefore, the City should add 320.34 acres of community and neighborhood parkland by 2030.

The demand-based approach evaluates demand and use of parks and facilities as well as levels of participation in recreation programs. It also involves public involvement techniques (telephone surveys, interviews, focus groups, etc.) that provide insight into user preferences and desires. The comprehensive planning process included a community-wide survey, public meetings, and focus groups.

In 2005, a Needs Assessment was also initiated in collaboration with the Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences at Texas A&M University. Focus groups, a public meeting, and a community-wide survey were conducted to aid and guide the City in long-range planning decisions concerning the needs of residents.

The resource-based approach considers the protection of natural and cultural resources and determines how they can best be utilized. This

TABLE 5.1
Neighborhood and Community Parkland Needs (2009)

2009 Estimated Population	2009 Park land (Acres) ¹	2009 Current Acres per 1,000	2009 Park land Needs (Acres) ²	2009 Deficit/Surplus (Acres)
91,009	623.06	6.84	637.06	-14

TABLE 5.2
Neighborhood and Community Parkland Needs (2017)

2030 Projected Population	2009 Park land (Acres) ¹	2030 Park land Needs (Acres) ²	2030 Deficit/Surplus (Acres)
134,772	623.06	943.40	-320.34

¹ Includes mini, neighborhood and community parks (including University-owned Hensel Park, which accounts for 29.7 acres in the community park category; excludes regional parks).

² Based on standard of 3.5 acres for neighborhood parks and 3.5 acres for community parks per 1,000 residents (total 7.0 acres per 1,000 residents).

2005 Needs Assessment

Some of the themes that surfaced through the 2005 Needs Assessment included a need for trails with increased connectivity to other trails and key destinations, a concentration on greening the City by acquiring more parkland and increasing tree plantings, improved communication and marketing of parks and recreation facilities and programs, as well as additional swimming pools, including a water park, and a senior center.

includes the City's greenway system, historic sites, and cemeteries. The Bicycle, Pedestrian and Greenways Master Plan will further define the manner in which stream corridors are utilized.

These three approaches provide a comprehensive analysis for future additions to the parks and recreation system as well as the greenway system. The Recreation, Park, and Open Space Master Plan and the Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Greenways Master Plan will further address land, facility and program needs that surfaced through this planning process.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Through the comprehensive planning process, College Station's residents identified various issues and opportunities facing the community with regard to parks, greenways, and the arts. The planning considerations highlighted in this section shaped the development of the goal, strategies and action recommendations that follow.

Maintaining a Premier Parks and Recreation System

The community must ensure College Station maintains and develops its parks and recreation system effectively to meet current and future needs. Considerations for the community include: (1) continued development of a balanced, convenient and accessible park system, (2) quality park appearance and maintenance, and (3) coordination, collaboration, and adequate funding.

Continued Development of a Balanced, Convenient and Accessible Park System

A successful parks and recreation system creates a balance of public open spaces and recreation opportunities across the community. All residents should have an equal opportunity to access parks and the facilities they offer to meet recreational needs.

A comprehensive parks and recreation system also offers a variety of park classifications, ranging in size and focus from regional (larger) to neighborhood parks (smaller), to satisfy diverse needs. Regional parks (typically serve the majority of residents and a regional or thematic focus like Lick Creek Park (Nature Park) or Veterans Park & Athletic Complex. Community parks serve residents within a two- to three-mile radius with expanded or more active recreation spaces, and facilities, such as Stephen C. Beachy Central Park or Southwood Athletic Park. Neighborhood parks serve the daily recreational needs of residents and are usually within walking distance. A variety of indoor and outdoor facilities and spaces, as well as an

adequate assortment of activities and programs, should be provided to meet the individual and collective needs of all the residents of College Station.

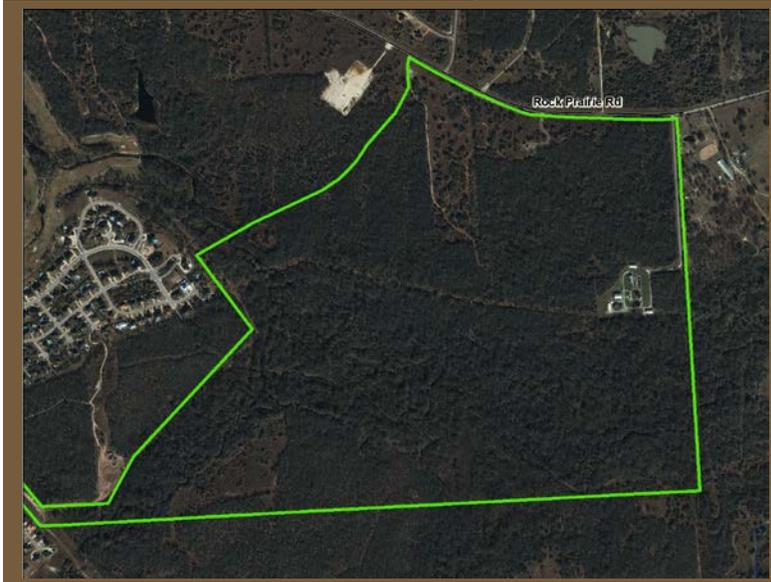
Quality Park Appearance and Maintenance

The condition and appearance of parks is an indicator of their value to the community. Collectively, parks and public open spaces can also contribute to the aesthetics, natural beauty, property values, and sustainability of the City.

Being a City faced with future growth and land development, College Station will see an increased demand for a parks and recreation system. To meet this increasing demand, mechanisms that encourage joint acquisition, development, and funding of public spaces will help the City stretch local resources for the development and redevelopment of its parks. Coordination and collaboration among agencies, such as with Brazos County, College Station Independent School District, the City of Bryan, Texas A&M University, developers, and other local agencies and organizations would mutually benefit all interests. It eases the municipal tax burden related to parks and recreation demands and, at the same time, enhances the quality of parks and recreation facilities and programs.

Coordination, Collaboration, and Adequate Funding

In a City that is faced with future growth and land development, College Station will see an increased demand for parks and recreation facilities and programs. To meet this increasing demand, mechanisms that encourage joint acquisition, development, and funding of public spaces will help the City to stretch local resources for the development and redevelopment of its parks. Coordination and collaboration among agencies, such as with Brazos County, College Station Independent School District, the City of Bryan, Texas A&M University, developers, and other



Parks and natural open space provide opportunities to experience and learn about the natural environment and sustainability. Lick Creek Nature Park is a successful example of a City park that fosters environmental education.



Athletic fields and courts, play areas, and open space at local public school campuses complement the City's parks and recreation system for nearby residents.

local agencies and organizations would mutually benefit all interests because it eases the municipal tax burden related to parks and recreation demands and, at the same time, enhances the quality of parks and recreation facilities and programs.

Collaboration requires effective communication and coordination among stakeholders. Through agreements reached between public/semi-public agencies, as well as partnerships with the private sector, the parks and recreation system can benefit in the quality and quantity of facilities and programs it offers. Joint acquisition, construction, operation, and maintenance allow more efficient use of public resources while ensuring that the system is well-coordinated and connected. Effectively leveraging State and Federal grants and private foundation funds is also important to developing and sustaining a parks and recreation system for the long term.

Enhancing the Greenways Program

The purpose of the Greenways Program is to establish a network of greenways or open space corridors throughout the community for conservation and recreation. Considerations for the community include: (1) promoting land acquisition in order to maximize City protection, public use and enjoyment; (2) creating connections to key destinations with greenway trails; and (3) natural resource stewardship through conservation, preservation and restoration.

Since the adoption of the first Greenways Master Plan by City Council in 1999, College Station has made progress toward establishing a network of greenway corridors across the community. As ongoing urbanization alters the City's natural landscape and quality of life, it is important to continue developing the greenway system through acquisition and protection.

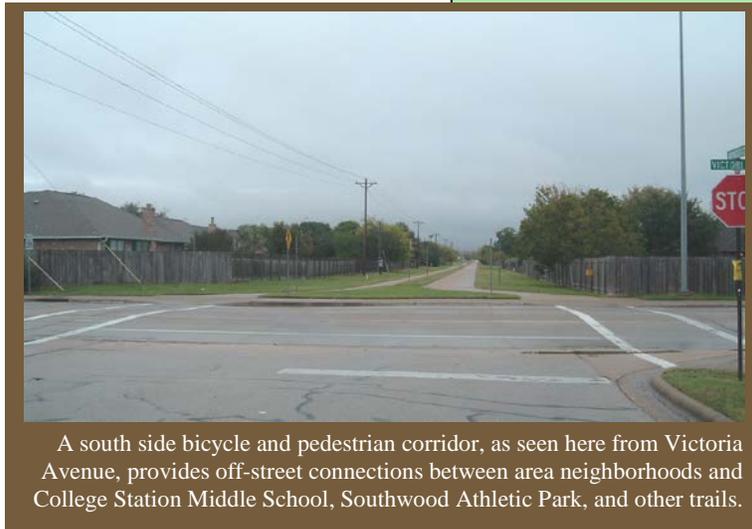
Greenways serve to protect linear open spaces that follow natural (e.g., rivers and streams and their floodplains) and man-made features (e.g., utility, road or rail corridors). They should remain in their natural state except for the introduction of greenway trails that connect people with places. Greenways to be protected in College Station currently include the following creeks: Alum, Bee, Carter, Lick, Spring, Wolf Pen, their tributaries and floodplains, as well as the Gulf States Utility Easement.

Greenways provide functional, aesthetic, economic and social benefits to the community including floodplain mitigation, trails, recreation, alternative modes of transportation, protection of wildlife and plants, increased real estate values to adjacent properties and tourist revenue. The greenways program and its benefits are still new to the community and will require education and promotion to be successful and effective.

Connection of Parks, Schools, and Neighborhoods Using Greenways

Greenway trails can connect people and places by providing an alternative mode of transportation for bicyclists and pedestrians. These linear corridors create opportunities for regional connectivity between neighborhoods, parks, schools, transit stops and a variety of key destinations that are convenient and safe. The benefits of the parks and recreation system are also enhanced as they become more readily accessible to residents through these trails.

The City will need to balance the preservation of open space and the introduction of trails to minimize environmental impacts with the other functions of greenways, including floodplain management, erosion control, stormwater management and the protection of wildlife and plants. Crime prevention through environmental design and universal design should also be incorporated into the location and design of greenways in order to ensure safety and accessibility.



Natural Resource Stewardship through Conservation, Preservation and Restoration

There are a variety of open spaces throughout College Station, the Extraterritorial Jurisdiction, and the City's public parks and greenways that encompass important natural resources worthy of environmental protection. Land along major rivers and streams such as the Brazos River, Carter Creek and their floodplains, existing utility easement, drainage easements, and agricultural lands in the Extraterritorial Jurisdiction, offer opportunities for land stewardship through conservation, preservation, or restoration. As College Station continues to develop, protecting its valuable natural resources will be important in maintaining the aesthetic character and environmental quality of the community.

Restoring and protecting natural areas provides the benefits of outdoor recreation opportunities and general enjoyment for the community. Rivers, streams and their riparian buffers serve as amenities which prevent flood damage, protect wildlife and plant habitat, recharge groundwater resources, provide for storm water management and improve water quality.

Better protection and use of natural areas in and around College

Station may be achieved by adopting sound environmental conservation practices and responsible land development practices. These natural areas should be incorporated into developments as natural amenities to help sustain their function as an environmental resource. Doing so requires policies that balance development and natural resource protection.

Recognizing and Supporting the Arts and Other Leisure Activities

As both the home of Texas A&M University and a growing, vibrant community in its own right, College Station increasingly desires to promote a range of activities to enliven its residents' leisure time. This includes unique and integrated opportunities for entertainment, education and culture. Such amenities clearly boost a community's livability and also make it more attractive to current and potential new residents, retirees, and businesses.

The City's Role in the Arts

In taking a direct role as both a promoter and purveyor of leisure time pursuits, the City recognizes the range of interests and abilities that are found across the community. With limited funds and staffing, both within municipal government and among its various private and non-profit partners, the City faces the challenge of being responsive to diverse wants and needs while attempting to focus on some core offerings so that a high quality facility and/or service can be provided and maintained over time. The City also has a role to play in more passive aspects, such as ongoing support for public art installations which make a statement about the community and enhance its image at gateway locations, along key corridors, and within parks and greenways.

GOALS, STRATEGIES, AND ACTIONS

The overall vision for College Station's community in the years ahead is to achieve and maintain a **diversity of parks, greenways and the arts for leisure and recreation as well as for entertainment, education and culture to achieve a high quality of life for all residents and visitors**. The three strategies in this section elaborate on these themes and community priorities.

Strategy 1: Maintain and expand the parks and recreation system as well as its facilities and programs consistent with growth expectations.

- **Plan Update.** Complete an update of the 2003 Recreation, Park, and Open Space Master Plan.
- **Needs Assessment.** In addition to periodic plan review and updates, a comprehensive, community-wide needs assessment should be completed at least every five years to evaluate

facilities and programs provided by the Parks and Recreation Department.

- **Secure more Parkland.** Continue to provide adequate land for future neighborhood, community, and regional park development. The Parkland Dedication Ordinance should continue to ensure community and neighborhood parkland dedication in the City limits and the Extraterritorial Jurisdiction. Additional methods should be used to supplement this effort in order to acquire prime parkland that is quickly disappearing through land development. This can be achieved through the Capital Improvements Program, public and private partnerships, and grants.
- **Park Development and Enhancement.** Invest in the rejuvenation of existing parks as well as complete improvements already detailed in previously approved master plans for specific parks and recreation facilities. Also develop additional master plans as appropriate (e.g., for future park development in the vicinity of the Rock Prairie Landfill once it closes, and for a skate park).
- **New and Enhanced Programs.** Pursue new programs and ongoing priorities that meet the needs of a growing and changing population.
- **Coordinated Improvements and Programming.** Implement new and improved facilities and programs with other agencies and entities where mutually beneficial partnership opportunities are available.
- **Role of the Private Sector.** Encourage the provision of parks facilities and programs that are unique or where demand exceeds supply through private sponsorship or investment such as additional swimming pools, a water park, or athletic fields.
- **Park Maintenance.** Further refine park maintenance standards that address growing needs of parks and facilities by optimizing and re-evaluating level of service standards.
- **Communication and Marketing.** Enhance awareness and accessibility to programs and facilities through the City's website, publications and media outlets.
- **Resource Protection and Sustainability.** Continue to program and budget for streetscape and gateway projects that include the planting of native trees and other vegetation to improve neighborhoods, transportation corridors and other public places to create a greener City.



Strategy 2: *Preserve and enhance the greenways system of linear open spaces and trails for their intrinsic and functional value.*

- **Plan Update.** Complete an update to the 1999 Greenways Master Plan.
- **Target Natural Corridors.** Designate key areas as “natural corridors” for phased greenway acquisition and development (specifically, the portion of Carter Creek from University Drive (SH 60) to the confluence with the Navasota River, and Lick Creek, from Pebble Creek Subdivision to the confluence with the Navasota River).
- **Focus on Acquisition.** Determine additional methods to secure greenways that will help to establish the system. Utilization of grants, public and private partnerships, and the Capital Improvements Program should continue. Building incentives that encourage developers to design and build greenway trails. Connections between developments should be explored, as well as overlay zones, annexation opportunities and conservation easements.



Carter Creek looking south from University Drive (SH 60).

A New Plan for Greenways

A Bicycle, Pedestrian and Greenways Master Plan will be created and adopted in 2009. This Plan will build upon previous recommendations and policies outlined in existing adopted plans, including the Bikeway and Pedestrian Master Plan (2002) and the Greenways Master Plan (1999). The goal in combining these master plans is to address non-motorized transportation in a comprehensive manner to achieve connectivity for recreation, commuting, and health and wellness. Upon completion, the new Master Plan will be adopted as a section of the City’s Comprehensive Plan.

- **Amend Ordinances.** Amend the drainage ordinance to include corridor widths and channel guidelines to protect greenways. Amend the Parkland Dedication Ordinance to complement recreation opportunities available in greenways.
 - **Implement Key Connections.** Create connections between key elements of the parks and recreation system and key destinations.
 - **Careful Design and Accessibility.** Design and construct sustainable and accessible trails that minimize environmental impact and promote scenic views and special features. Encourage developments that are oriented towards and designed for accessibility to greenway trails.
 - **Attention to Maintenance.** Develop maintenance standards for greenways and trails. Costs of ongoing maintenance should be addressed through initial budgeting for new or extended greenway segments.
- **Coordination at all Levels.** Promote cross-jurisdictional and inter-agency coordination on greenways acquisition, maintenance, funding and network expansion. Encourage neighborhood associations and other organizations to assist with upkeep

(adoption programs) and inventory (wildlife, vegetation, wetlands and other natural features).

Strategy 3: *Create and promote the arts through entertainment, educational and cultural opportunities that serve a variety of interests and abilities.*

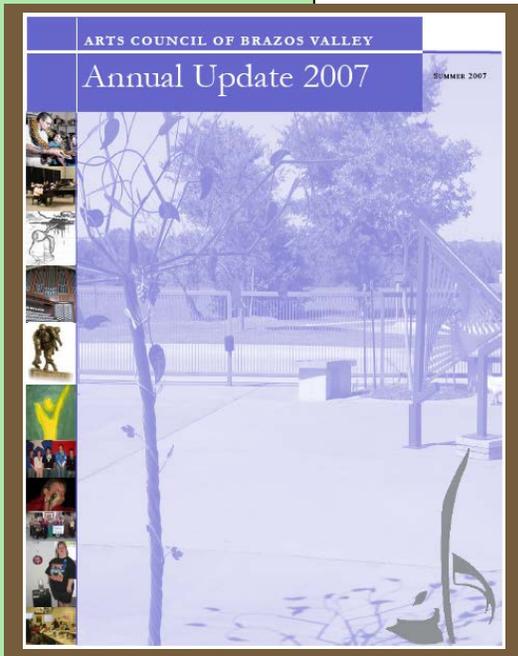
- **Leadership and Partnership.** Continue the City's direct engagement, promotion and support of local and regional arts through representation on the Board of Directors of the Arts Council of Brazos Valley (ACBV), and through direct annual budget allocations to the Arts Council of Brazos Valley from the City's hotel occupancy tax revenue.
- **Facility Potential.** Determine whether the City, potentially in coordination with one or more other partners, including both the College Station Independent School District and Bryan Independent School District, City of Bryan, and Blinn College, should develop a performing arts facility, including a performing arts component with appropriate space and design (e.g., theater/stage size and seating range, potential dual large and small performance spaces), either initially or through potential future expansion phases.
- **Wolf Pen Creek District.** Continue to promote the multi-purpose mission of the Wolf Pen Creek District, particularly the City's intent as an area to live, work, and play.
- **Redevelopment Opportunities.** Through anticipated redevelopment activity in coming years, especially where older apartment blocks are likely to be redone in similar or new land uses and/or use mixes, monitor opportunities to incorporate arts space or other components into redeveloped sites.



Wolf Pen Creek corridor near Holleman Drive and Dartmouth Street.



Amphitheatre in the Wolf Pen Creek District.



- **Arts Related Programming.** Continue the City's role in nurturing young local artists and offering leisure and educational activities to adults and seniors, such as through the Senior Xtra Education program.
- **Direct Promotion.** Continue direct promotion of local cultural and entertainment offerings through the City's own website, and in coordination with the Bryan-College Station Convention & Visitors Bureau.
- **City Staff Support.** Continue to provide direct staff support for arts and cultural offerings.
- **Public Art.** The City should continue to support a community-wide installation and maintenance program in conjunction with the Arts Council of Brazos County, the City of Bryan, Texas A&M University, Brazos Valley, and the Texas Department of Transportation.