

# Parks & Recreation

Horizon Plan

Parks and recreation facilities are an integral part of the public infrastructure system and essential to Huntsville's strategic goal of promoting and sustaining "active living" for all residents. Foresight and preparedness is of utmost importance to adequately plan to satisfy the needs and desires of citizens – both now and in the future. This chapter is intended to guide the City's decisions as to the enhancement of existing parks and the ongoing development of new facilities and trails to pace future changes in population and development.

The purpose of this Parks and Recreation Chapter is to determine the community's current and future needs for improving its existing parks and providing adequate areas and facilities to meet its immediate and long-term needs. This plan element will form the policy direction pertaining to the timing of park development, their placement within the City and its extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ), the type of facilities, and the method by which enhancements and improvements may be funded. It guides the City's planning efforts for developing a suitable public parks and recreation system and incorporating private contributions. This chapter addresses the availability, quality, type, size, and location of recreation opportunities to meet the needs of Huntsville's residents and visitors to the community.

Parks and recreation facilities are an essential part of a healthy, quality, and sustainable community environment. They provide the necessary components for events outside of the home, after work, and after school activities. Whether for passive or active use, parks and recreation facilities are an important part of everyday active living. Much like streets and sidewalks, water and wastewater lines, drainage facilities, police and fire equipment, and other municipal facilities and services, parks are an integral component of the municipal infrastructure. Therefore, they warrant a significant level of attention and commitment of resources.

A comprehensive and interrelated system of parks that responds to the needs and values of local residents contributes to a community's quality of life and livability. Parks and recreation opportunities also contribute to the health of residents, provide a variety of recreational and educational activities for all ages, and preserve the

"People come here for green space and the environment."

- Comment during  
Land Owners-Developers  
Focus Group  
(July 6, 2006)

"With our forests and pastoral setting, we need to look at all of Huntsville as living in a park, and we're developing within it."

- Comment from  
CPAC(X) member

### Planning Principles

- ◆ All residents and visitors will have unrestricted access to public park areas and recreational facilities regardless of their age, gender, race, income, cultural background, housing environment, or handicap;
- ◆ Public recreation will be highly coordinated with other organizations and programs, including Walker County, Sam Houston National Forest, Huntsville State Park, Huntsville ISD, civic clubs, athletic organizations, private entities, and others to avoid duplication and encourage cooperation;
- ◆ Public recreation will incorporate other public services such as education, health and fitness, transportation, and leisure;
- ◆ The arts will be incorporated into the City's park sites through partnerships with local artists and organizations;
- ◆ Facilities will be well planned and coordinated to ensure adequate adaptability to future needs and requirements;
- ◆ There will be an established process and procedure for acquiring land for future parks and recreational areas and facilities prior to development; and
- ◆ The design of spaces and facilities will encourage the most efficient utilization of land and will consider the needs, desires and opinions of the intended users.

integrity of the natural environment. They are also important in attracting visitors to the community and, thus, contribute to local tourism and economic development.

Understanding the economic impacts of parks can help decision makers better evaluate the implementation and maintenance of parks and public open spaces. Parks provide intrinsic environmental, aesthetic, and recreation benefits. They enhance property values, increase municipal revenues, and attract homebuyers and retirees. Parks are a solid financial investment for a community.<sup>i</sup>

While this plan chapter does not deal directly with arts, culture and historic resource opportunities and initiatives in Huntsville, CPAC(X) members thought it important to underscore the commonalities among all these amenities their community has to offer. All of these volunteer and patron experiences are rewarding for both residents and visitors and should therefore remain a key focus of the public, private and non-profit sectors, building upon such successes as the Wynne Home Arts Center and the downtown Building Façade Project and working through the Huntsville Arts Commission, the Main Street Program, the Walker County Historical Commission, and the City's Cultural Services Division. To illustrate the point, one CPAC(X) member noted that the Main Street Board "sees themselves as maintaining a park in downtown," and the Downtown-SHSU campus linkage remains a top priority.

### ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

This Comprehensive Plan element is designed to ensure that Huntsville "catches up" on any deficiencies in the provision of parks and recreation areas and facilities and is also prepared to keep pace with ongoing population growth and new development. As the long-range planning process progressed, two issues emerged as priorities for the community: (1) implementing a "parks-to-standard" program, and (2) expanding hike and bike trails throughout the city.

The City's current parks require immediate attention to enhance them and bring them to a defined minimum standard of quality and adequacy. Additionally, several key demographics for Huntsville are that the median age is 28.3 years and the largest age cohort is 30-34 year olds. This means the community is quite young, thereby necessitating both spaces and programs for their attention and recreation needs. Improving the quality of life for citizens by offering a variety of programs and physical activities to this particular age group would provide not only benefit to them, but the community as a whole. Through enhancing the park system, young professionals and their families will be more inclined to consider Huntsville their home. At the same time, it must be recognized that age-related statistics for Huntsville are skewed by the extent of student and prisoner population in the area. So, parks and recreation opportunities and programs must be diverse enough to suit the needs of all age groups, including Huntsville's older residents.

During the comprehensive planning process, it was also emphasized that the needs of youth sports, along with other athletic associations and leagues for all ages, be recognized and addressed. The City's Recreation Services division focuses most directly on this constituency, which includes the following groups that are active in Huntsville:

- ♦ Huntsville Youth Soccer Association
- ♦ Huntsville Adult Soccer Association
- ♦ Huntsville Boys Baseball Association
- ♦ Huntsville Girls Softball Association
- ♦ Men's City League
- ♦ Co-Ed Church League
- ♦ Women's Softball League
- ♦ Huntsville Youth Football Association
- ♦ Pop Warner Football
- ♦ Huntsville Little Dribblers Basketball

### Resource Conservation and Enhancement

Huntsville is located on the western edge of the Piney Woods of East Texas. There are unique recreational opportunities in both Sam Houston National Forest and Huntsville State Park that attract visitors to this part of the state. The "Blue Lagoon" site north of Huntsville, which is a magnet for divers, and nearby Lake Livingston and Lake Conroe are additional assets within convenient reach of Huntsville and Walker County residents. It is essential to raise public awareness of the ecological importance and value of preserving – and, in some cases, reclaiming – such special resources, especially as the community continues to expand and develop. Sensitivity to these critical areas must remain a priority for Huntsville to ensure their long-term conservation and protection.



There are areas interspersed throughout the community and around the larger planning area that possess valuable natural resources warranting protection. Lands adjacent to creeks and flood-prone areas, as well as sites and vistas with stands of mature trees, offer opportunities for resource conservation and land preservation. While these areas are sensitive to urban development, they may be utilized to fulfill other community objectives, such as environmental protection, open space preservation, and sound resource management.

Numerous comments were received through the focus group interviews and Ward meetings for this plan expressing a desire for more “green space” in new development, as well as greenways and hike/bike trail connections within the community. These objectives may be achieved by adopting sound environmental conservation and responsible land development practices. Sensitive areas along creeks and elsewhere may be incorporated into developments as natural amenities, helping to sustain their function as an environmental resource. Doing so requires a regulatory system that balances development efficiency and resource protection.

Parks and public open spaces create essential opportunities for protecting and preserving natural resources and sensitive lands. As the community continues to develop, it is advisable for the City to seek preservation of its valuable resource areas, such as creek corridors, areas within or immediately adjacent to flood plains, and critical habitats and known areas for roosting or migratory birds. These areas provide great value to the community landscape and act as an attraction for visitors and tourists. In fact, nature tourism is one of the largest growth sectors of the economy. Capitalizing on this opportunity may boost the local economy by attracting more eco-tourists to visit and stay in the area, particularly those drawn by the national forest and state park.

### Balanced, Convenient and Accessible Parks

A key to a well-utilized system of parks is an even distribution of recreation areas and public open spaces throughout the community. In this way, all residents have convenient access to public open spaces and facilities, thereby meeting their active and passive recreation needs. It is important that each park be located and designed to be compatible with the surrounding neighborhoods. Depending on demographics and the availability of other facilities, some neighborhoods may be more interested in active play areas, such as basketball and tennis courts and open play fields, while others desire passive activities, such as nature trails and picnic areas. For this reason, it is essential to include users in the planning and design phases of park development.

A true "system" of parks offers a wide range of public spaces, including sizable facilities intended for persons within the broader region, such as Huntsville State Park; facilities that may be used by the whole community (but especially by those within a one-mile radius) like Eastham-Thomason Park or the much anticipated Aquatic Center; parks that are intended for use mainly by residents of nearby neighborhoods, such as with Bush-Miller Park; and those recreational sites used by an individual development, such as a play area within an apartment complex. The value of an adequate park system is in its ability to meet the individual needs of all persons.

#### For the Children

Parks provide children:

- ◆ A place to engage in healthy physical activity.
- ◆ A hands-on learning environment where they can express their creativity and develop problem-solving and social skills.
- ◆ A sense of place and belonging as an antidote to violence, social alienation and vandalism.
- ◆ The motivation to explore and discover.

The term "balanced" refers to a combination of both indoor and outdoor facilities, as well as an adequate assortment of different types of activities, both passive and active, to meet the recreational needs of residents year-round.

### Connecting Parks, Schools and Neighborhoods

The recreational and social value of parks is increased exponentially when they are linked through a series of greenbelts along natural water courses and drainage ways, trail and walkway/bikeway corridors, and other ties and connections. Just as it is necessary to plan for road networks and other public infrastructure in advance of growth, it is also important to plan and protect "green infrastructure" in coordination with development.<sup>ii</sup> An interconnected system of bicycle and pedestrian facilities may serve as a resource for recreation and exercise, while providing an added benefit as an alternative mode of transportation. Given Huntsville's proximity to Sam Houston National Forest and Huntsville State Park, it would be ideal for the City to seize opportunities to connect its local trails with these regional amenities.

A system of parks and recreation areas is not complete without linear linkages between park facilities, neighborhoods, schools and other public use facilities. Such linkages may boost accessibility to parks and other public spaces, thereby expanding the effective service area coverage of these existing parks. This, in turn, reduces the amount of public investment necessary to locate and construct parks densely throughout the community. It is acknowledged, though, that trails are expensive and sometimes difficult to introduce and construct in already developed environments. Therefore, a plan is warranted to identify the best and most efficient means for achieving the intent of a community trail network, which is to enhance pedestrian and other non-motorized mobility within the city.

The existing trails that run through Eastham-Thomason Park and elsewhere could serve as a foundation for developing pedestrian walkways and bike paths connecting the University, downtown and residential areas throughout the community. The challenge is finding ways to make connections, possibly by on- or off-street means, to tie these facilities into a community-wide network of trails and



walking paths. Lateral connections to the trail system could be developed along utility and/or drainage easements with excess rights-of-way and, in more rural areas, by using the wide shoulder lanes of farm-to-market and state highways.

The fact that cities develop in an incremental fashion adds to the complexity of achieving a continuous system of linkages. This appears to be the historical and ongoing scenario for Huntsville as well. Case in point is the trail development at Eastham-Thomason Park, which is limited to that particular park. Without advance planning, these linkages will not happen naturally. To realize a comprehensive trail network over time, there must be a connectivity review at the stage of subdivision development, backed by the necessary requirements and standards for road continuity, sidewalks and trails within rights-of-way and easements, and other essential planning and design considerations, such as safe intersection crossings, curb cuts, signage, and various other factors.

### Quality Park Appearance and Maintenance

The condition and appearance of parks is an indicator of their value to the community, whether intended or not. The perception of a community that has parks in “tired” condition and in need of both improvement and enhancement is that the community does not fully appreciate how much parks contribute to livability and community identity. In fact, recent studies have shown that quality parks increase adjacent property values and are a consideration in home shopping and purchase decisions. Collectively, parks and public open space areas also contribute to the aesthetics and natural beauty of the community.

The idea of a “parks-to-standard” program is to set a standard by which all parks, recreation areas, and public spaces are measured, with improvements conducted to bring each to an equivalent standard – and to adhere to that standard over time through an ongoing maintenance commitment. In this way, the entire park system is elevated in quality and level of importance. This may be accomplished through both public and private efforts. The City may earmark a dedicated funding source for equipment replacement, building revitalization, and increased maintenance. The private sector and individual residents and groups may provide in-kind services, volunteer labor (“Adopt-a-Park” approach), and contribution of funding through improvement fees.

Some of Huntsville’s parks suffer from a lack of investment – or reinvestment – while others simply need increased maintenance. The improvements needed include replacement of equipment; installation of irrigation systems and a rigorous grounds maintenance program; reconstruction of major facilities, such as swimming pools and bath houses; court resurfacing or replacement; new benches, tables, grills and trash containers; additional landscaping and shade trees; picnic facilities and shaded

gathering areas; improved and/or expanded parking areas; and new fencing and lighting.

While the community is in need of additional park space to stay on pace with new development, as discussed later in this chapter, the first priority for the park system should be to improve the existing parks and bring them to the quality and maintenance level expected by residents. This will require a significant commitment by elected leaders to provide the necessary funds to catch up on current deficiencies while also preparing for future needs. All improvements certainly do not need to be achieved at once. Instead, community standards and desires may eventually be achieved through establishment of immediate, mid-term and long-range priorities.

### Coordination, Collaboration and Adequate Funding

Aging infrastructure, changing demographics, and increased demand for recreational programs and facilities have strained the resources of both Huntsville and Walker County. Huntsville is home to the Texas Department of Criminal Justice and Sam Houston State University, both of which occupy significant acreage within the community and thereby impact the City's tax revenue potential. Intergovernmental agreements and public-private partnerships create opportunities to use limited tax dollars wisely, utilize land efficiently, and conserve precious environmental resources.

A collaborative approach to parks and recreation planning requires communication and coordination among all vested entities and interested parties. In Huntsville's case, this could include the City, Walker County, the school district, Sam Houston State University, and other public agencies, as well as potential private sector partners. Joint acquisition, development and ongoing operation and maintenance of public spaces leverages resources, enhances the quality of parks and recreational facilities, and increases their effectiveness and interconnection.

### GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS

The following goals, objectives and recommended actions were formulated to specifically address the issues and needs outlined above, which were culled from extensive community input as well as deliberations of the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee. The goals reflect the overall vision of the community, which may be achieved through the objectives and by acting on the recommendations.

**GOAL 5.1: A balanced and wide variety of public parks, recreational areas and open space in near proximity to all residents.**

#### Available Funding Techniques

- ◆ Current revenue
  - ◆ Reserve funds
- ◆ Enterprise and revenue funds
- ◆ General obligation bonds
  - ◆ Lease-purchase
  - ◆ Eminent domain
- ◆ Authorities and special districts
  - ◆ Sales tax
  - ◆ User fees
- ◆ In-kind services and volunteer participation
  - ◆ State and federal assistance
- ◆ Land donation
  - ◆ Trust fund
- ◆ Private financing
- ◆ Land dedication
  - ◆ Fee-in-lieu of development
  - ◆ Tax deferral

◆ *Develop an even distribution of parks and recreation facilities throughout the community and developing portions of the ETJ.*

1. Focus on new park development in the far western and eastern areas of north Huntsville and also in southern Huntsville.
2. Continue to monitor opportunities to acquire desirable tracts that are favorably situated in new growth areas for future park development. It is particularly important to target potential purchases before area land prices begin to escalate with oncoming urbanization.



3. Continue to address the needs of youth sports and athletic leagues for adequate fields and facilities to support the community's desired level of recreational activity and offerings.
4. Expand upon the range of facilities and improvements available within the community to include those that may provide an added attraction, such as a spray park; local art park; historical monument walk; farmers' market; bird, butterfly, and wildlife observation areas; interpretive gardens; skateboard park; coordinated "graffiti" park; spring-fed wading pool; BMX cycling course; frisbee

golf; an indoor recreation center with weight and exercise room, basketball and racquetball courts, climbing wall, and meeting/ training rooms; and other types of activity areas per the preferences of community residents.

◆ *Invest and reinvest in the community's parks and recreation system to raise its quality standard and make it sustainable.*

5. Prepare an updated parks and recreation master plan. The parks-to-standards approach discussed within this chapter should be the overarching philosophy behind the new plan.
6. While preparing for the next master plan update (which is expected to be at least several years from now), assess the viability of certain land and problematic sites already within the City's inventory and determine whether the City should consider disposing of certain properties to pursue other parkland and trail opportunities (such areas could also be devoted to

drainage functions and maintenance versus continuing to identify them as “undeveloped” public parks).

7. Through the park master plan process, conduct interviews with local residents from each geographic area of the community to identify the types of facilities and improvements desired in public parks. From this exercise, develop prototypical diagrams for mini parks, neighborhood parks and community parks, which may then be used to guide the redevelopment of existing parks and construction of new parks.
  8. Support and carry out an aggressive park and facility maintenance program, which must be acted upon rigorously and continuously. The program must, first, identify and log all necessary maintenance items, including repair of broken equipment, identification of unsafe conditions and remedies for correction, and items needing more significant capital expenditures. Cost estimates should be compiled and integrated into the parks master plan annual work program and the City’s multi-year capital improvements programming.
  9. Re-organize the City’s parks and recreation function, as appropriate, such that the requisite number of maintenance personnel is assigned solely to the park system, without significant responsibilities other than the revitalization and ongoing maintenance of each park.
  10. Establish and/or enhance a “Friends of the Park” program to solicit neighborhood and business involvement in maintaining and policing public parks and open space areas, including esplanades and public gardens.
  11. Improve accessibility for disabled and handicapped users by adding sidewalk curb cuts and ramps and wheelchair-accessible sidewalks and trails and providing accessible facilities such as play equipment, drinking fountains and restrooms.
- ◆ *Provide official support and adequate funding and resources – on par with similar-sized communities – to perform ongoing maintenance and repairs and to construct needed improvements at existing and future parks and recreation facilities*



The developer of residential lots shall dedicate land for park uses ... at a rate of one acre per 100 dwelling units or 10 percent of the total development ... whichever is less up to a maximum of six (6) acres dedicated for park and recreational purposes.

*Section 1203. 1,  
City of Huntsville  
Development Code*

12. Include in the updated parks master plan specific funding sources for priority improvements and a strategic implementation program with annual targets and objectives for the first five years.
13. Establish a dedicated funding source for implementation of the parks-to-standards program. Such funding may be from a single source, such as the hotel/motel tax, or from a combination of sources including Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds, bond funds, fee in-lieu of land dedication, and other sources.
14. Establish provisions to allow payment of fees to the City in lieu of dedicating land within new developments for public parks and open space purposes. The structure of fees in lieu of land must be based upon an appraised value of the existing parks and their improvements so as to ensure adequate

resources to fund new facilities of an equivalent standard. Collected fees must be invested to acquire and develop new parks or expand and enhance existing parks within the same vicinity (park zone) from which the fee was exacted. However, developers cannot be expected to bear the entire burden of expanding Huntsville’s park system. Ultimately, the City must rely on other funding measures to achieve its park system goals (e.g., bonds, capital budgeting, grants).

15. Implement user fees where justified and appropriate to bolster maintenance budgets. The most likely candidates for user fees, according the last master plan, include Thomas Henry Ball (Josey) and

**Payment-in-Lieu Requirements in Other Texas Cities**

Municipality	Payment-in-Lieu Standard
Edinburg	\$125 per lot and \$125 per dwelling (single-family subdivision)
	\$125 per lot and \$125 per dwelling (two-family and multi-family subdivision)
Mission	\$200 per dwelling unit
League City	\$198 per dwelling unit plus a \$358 development fee (single-family)
	\$160 per dwelling unit plus a \$292 development fee (duplex and multi-family)
Rosenberg	\$350 per dwelling unit
McAllen	\$450 per dwelling unit
Pharr	\$1,250 per acre of development plus a
	\$250 development fee per residential dwelling unit

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative

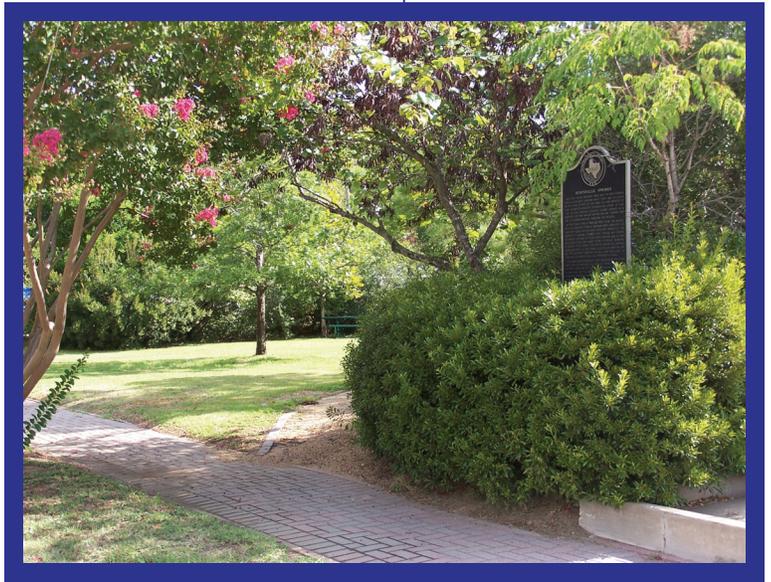
Eastham-Thomason parks. User fees may also be appropriate for the new aquatic center.

16. Regularly prepare nominations and applications to qualify for grant assistance or other funding arrangements to finance annual capital improvements.
17. Maintain a clear, convenient and accountable process for the City to accept financial donations and bequests of land. Just as universities, hospitals and cultural institutions systematically pursue individual and corporation donations, the City must be in a position to do the same, especially when approached by willing donors or those interested in a public/private partnership on a particular initiative or improvement.

**GOAL 5.2: Conservation and public enjoyment of natural resources.**

◆ *Use the City's development regulations and standards to ensure environmentally sensitive land planning and development.*

1. Incorporate into the City's development standards provisions for protection of resources (including strategic "micro-scale" landscape preservation and enhancement in existing commercial areas and corridors, as suggested by a CPAC(X) member). For properties that have sensitive resources, a density bonus may be given to transfer development density to a less vulnerable area of the property. The resource area may then be dedicated to the community as permanent passive open space or as active recreation space, such as for trails and greenways. The density bonus offsets may act as an incentive to the developer by allowing an increase in the overall development yield. Refer to **Chapter 2, Land Use & Community Character**, for further discussion of conservation development techniques. The City should also establish clear criteria for land dedications to avoid problematic, impractical sites with limited value for public use.
2. The City's Development Code should include storm water management provisions that address not only safe and effective conveyance of storm drainage, but also requirements to maintain the quality of area streams and aquifers by reducing or eliminating pollutants in storm water runoff. Strategies include avoidance, minimization and mitigation. Avoidance techniques may include cluster development; flood plain, drainageway, and wetland resource protection standards; and positive surface drainage in natural channels. Minimization techniques may include water gardens, rain barrels or cisterns, pervious pavement, vegetated swales, riparian buffers, swale blocks, and curbs without storm sewers. Mitigation measures are necessary where adverse impacts could not be avoided or minimized.
3. Evaluate opportunities for possible development of recreational vehicle communities and other types of overnight stay facilities within or near the edge of Huntsville that would appeal to short-term visitors and tourists. The City's Development Code should include adequate standards to ensure quality development outcomes that are an asset to the community.



- ◆ *Adopt “eco-friendly” practices in the City’s own parks and open space planning and maintenance programs.*

4. Establish standards and procedures for park maintenance to eliminate potential adverse risk to the quality of adjacent streams and water bodies through “no-mow” zones, staged mowing heights in accordance with distances from the channel edge, prudent and well-supervised application of pesticide and herbicide products, and other minimization techniques.
5. Develop a city-wide greenways program along each of the creeks, floodways and drainageways, and other flood-prone areas, as well as forested corridors within the city and ETJ. Also explore opportunities to “re-expose” and

reclaim natural creek alignments in the downtown and SHSU campus areas, which may require both pedestrian and vehicular bridges in some locations. These areas may then be used to protect the resource through sound management practices while also hosting recreational trails to tie the community together.

6. Develop a “land bank” program in which owners of properties in the flood plain are encouraged to deed such land to the “bank” to ensure long-term conservation, which would be offset by incentives for increased development density or other favorable dimensional allowances on the balance of the

property that is outside the flood plain. Non-profit organizations that specialize in land acquisition and establishment of conservation easements can assist with such initiatives.

7. Locate new parks to leverage their value for preserving the environment and educating the public about the importance of land and resource management. In general, ecological education should be incorporated into the local park system and associated programming.

**GOAL 5.3: Incremental development of a complete community trail network.**

- ◆ *Prepare a Trail, Bikeway and Greenway Master Plan as a complement to the City’s Parks & Recreation Master Plan.*

1. Depict in the new master plan an overall network of off-street trails, nature trails and paths within linear greenways, and both on- and off-street bike lanes and routes. The master plan should examine possible and feasible ways to create linkages, including trails along existing easements or rights-of-way, re-striping of road sections (or extra-wide curb/shoulder lanes) to



include a designated bike lane, repair of existing sidewalks and completion of missing links, and construction of off-street trail segments.

2. Inventory and map all existing trail segments and sidewalks throughout Huntsville's developed area. Subsequently, identify missing and incomplete segments needed to improve continuity, particularly those adjacent to schools, parks, public buildings, and other pedestrian generators and attractors, such as Downtown and Sam Houston State University. The trails at Eastham-Thomason Park and the Town Creek Trail through downtown Huntsville could serve as the starting points for an expanded trail network throughout the community.
  3. Prepare a near-term capital improvement plan and program for those segments that will have an immediate impact, meaning those by which connections may be made to and between significant destinations with relatively little planning and investment.
  4. Utilize utility corridors as trails and connections within and between neighborhoods. These areas must have an improved surface, although a paved surface is not always necessary or preferred. For new development, the proposed alignment of utility corridors should be evaluated with trail considerations in mind during preliminary plat review.
  5. In conjunction with the action recommendations in **Chapter 3, Transportation**, pursue a comprehensive sidewalk improvement program to repair, replace or install new sidewalks where they may be used as a connection to the community-wide trail network.
  6. Adopt a policy for the potential conversion and use of abandoned railroad corridors, under-utilized or vacant alleys, and other rights-of-way and easements as trails and walking connections.
  7. Regularly submit grant applications to state and federal programs and other available resources to leverage funds for trails and bikeway planning and development.
- ◆ *Use the City's Development Regulations as another means to promote the gradual emergence of a city-wide trail and bikeway network.*
8. Establish requirements for the dedication of easements or rights-of-way from new developments that adjoin or overlap the City's planned trail network. Rights-of-way must be dedicated for main trail segments and easements dedicated within the development to provide direct access points to the system. Design standards must also be established for



segments of the trail and other connections to ensure long-lasting construction and minimized maintenance.

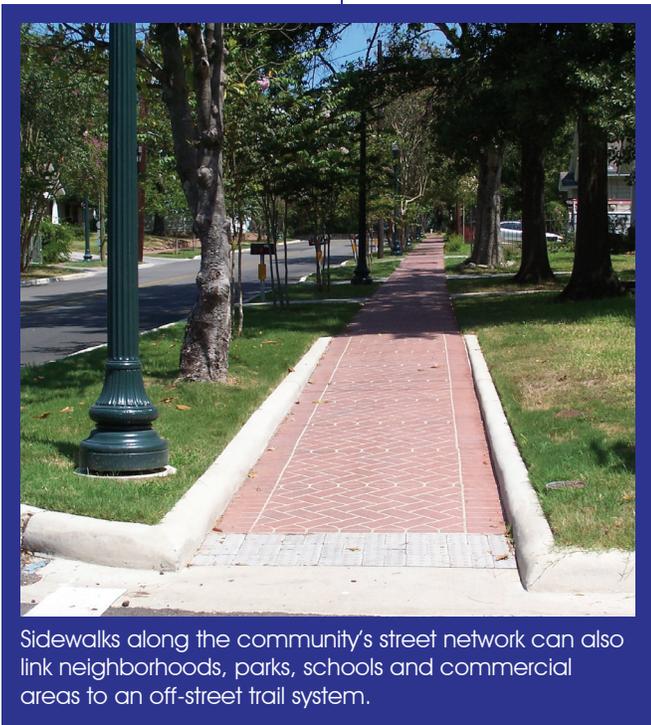
9. Amend the subdivision regulations within the City's Development Code to require pedestrian easements in appropriate mid-block locations between lots (or at the end of cul-de-sacs and elsewhere) to allow access to existing or planned parks and trails. This must be integrated as part of the preliminary plat review and approval process, which will require designation of park and school sites and identification of sidewalk locations and any planned internal trails within the development.

10. Amend the street cross sections in the City's Development Code, as appropriate, to include provisions for trails and bikeways. These facilities should be included in new road projects, as well as reconstruction projects, where feasible and acceptable. At a minimum, sidewalks should be constructed along both sides of collector and arterial streets and one (preferably both) sides of local streets. Provisions must also be made for pedestrian walkways on bridges and across culverts. Refer to **Chapter 3, Transportation**, for further discussion on these topics.

**GOAL 5.4: Coordinated and cooperative approaches to addressing the area's recreational needs and environmental conservation priorities.**

- ◆ *Form mutually beneficial arrangements with both public and private partners to expand and improve the provision of recreational services and facilities.*

1. Develop agreements with Walker County and Sam Houston State University to address potential joint acquisition of land, improvement and maintenance of land and facilities, and use and management of areas and buildings, especially to avoid duplication of efforts and services (the City recently concluded such an agreement with Huntsville ISD).
2. Coordinate with Walker County and the Texas Department of Transportation to install signage and maintain adequate shoulders along the Interstate 45 frontage roads; Highways 30, 190 and 75; and other appropriate roadways to accommodate avid distance cyclists. Other important factors that contribute to the safety of area cyclists include signal timing that is adequate for crossing busy roadways, and appropriate crossing points across the I-45 corridor.



Sidewalks along the community's street network can also link neighborhoods, parks, schools and commercial areas to an off-street trail system.

3. Re-establish and maintain a formal agreement with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice for the use of prison labor in parkland maintenance.
4. Explore more formal arrangements/agreements with individual user groups, such as adult and youth sports associations, to document recreational demand and specific needs and ensure appropriate contributions to field and facility maintenance based on level of utilization.
5. Establish programs for lease/purchase, tax incentives, and public maintenance support to entice private sector participation in park system and recreational trail development. The City can also explore alliances with local churches and other institutions for use of their facilities, as available, in exchange for certain improvements and/or maintenance support.
6. Maintain partnerships and communication with the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department and U.S. Forest Service to determine mutual ways to ensure the effective long-term management and conservation of Huntsville State Park and Sam Houston National Forest. This should include consideration of ways to boost visitation and use to the mutual benefit of local, state, federal and private interests with economic development, nature tourism and environmental education objectives. Potential off-road trail linkages between the community and these regional recreational assets should be explored cooperatively, as this could incorporate bicycle rental concessions and other tourist-oriented services, interpretive signage and historical monuments, and conservation initiatives along and near such trail segments.

### PARK CLASSIFICATION

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) published the Recreation, Park, and Open Space Standards and Guidelines to establish nationally applicable criteria for the provision of parks and recreation facilities and open space. These standards serve as a guide for parks and recreation planning but do not replace reasonable judgment or specific local needs. The needs and desires of the citizens of Huntsville justify continued development of parks and recreation facilities and preservation of open space to meet the specific needs and requirements of the community.

While national standards are useful, it is important to ensure they are reasonable for the community given considerations such as participation trends, user characteristics, demographics, socioeconomics, climate, natural environment, and other factors. For example, Huntsville is unique due to its proximity to Sam Houston National Forest and Huntsville State Park. It is essential that the standards ultimately used for local parks and recreation planning represent the interests and desires of the community.

#### Social Benefits of Parks and Open Space

Evidence suggests that green spaces may help people relieve mental fatigue, thereby reducing aggression – which, in turn, relieves stress. Green spaces in residential areas give neighbors gathering spaces to foster social ties, resulting in a stronger sense of community and safer neighborhoods.

A variety of types and sizes of parks and recreation facilities and associated activities are recommended to satisfy the diverse interests of the population, to ensure adequate and equal opportunity for all persons, and, ultimately, to encourage use by all population groups. The classifications of parks needed to meet the diverse needs of the community are as described below.

### Community Parks

Community parks are intended to function on a large scale, serving the parks and recreation needs of an entire community. They are typically larger in size and include facilities and improvements for area-wide activities and assembly events such as picnic areas, walking/jogging trails, athletic fields, and other larger-scale activities. It is important that adequate off-street parking be provided. Where feasible, community parks should be located adjacent or connected to a greenway to provide an off-street linear linkage with other areas. Displayed in [Figure 5.1, Illustrative Community Park](#), is a typical community park.

#### Role of Community Parks

In cities like Huntsville, a community park often serves as the principal focal point for civic gatherings and organized recreational programs, special events, and sports league play. Further, a community park can often become a major landmark, a symbol that enhances community identity and is beloved by residents.

The size of community parks varies according to the availability of land and the ability to take advantage of acquisition opportunities over time. Many community parks in smaller cities are situated along river or creek corridors; others were integrated into a city at the time of original settlement and platting.

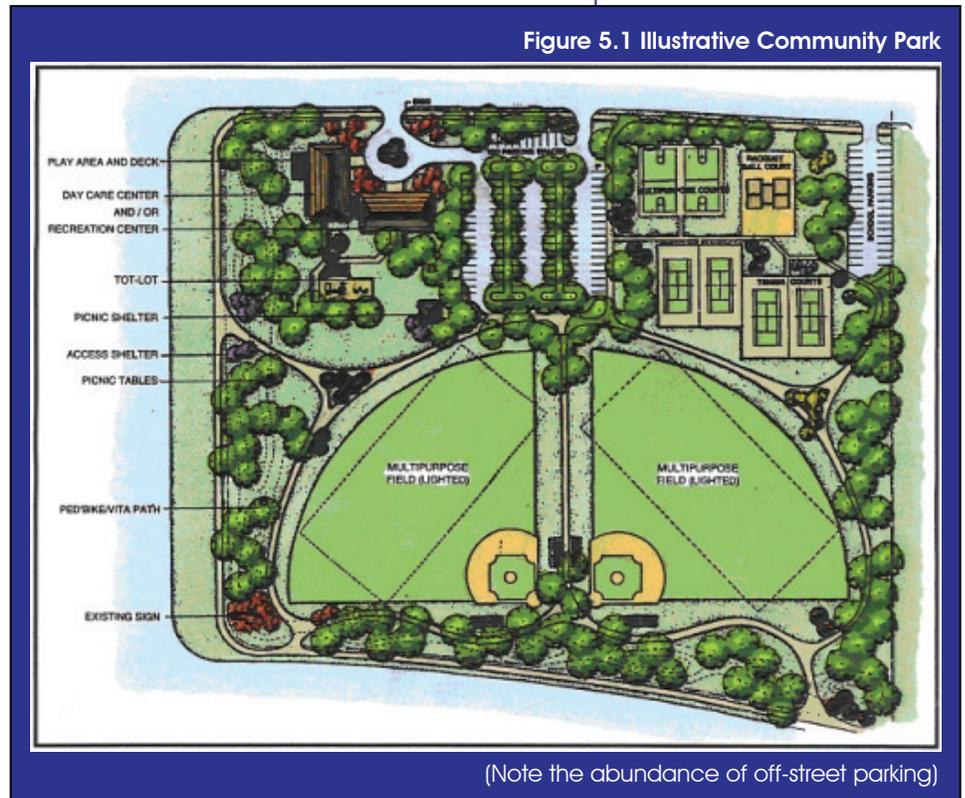
#### Community Park Standards

National standards recommend a minimum community park size of 10 acres, assuming appropriate topography and absence of other development constraints. Many community parks, especially those with athletic field complexes for organized sports, are as large as 25 to 40 acres. In overall acreage terms, the standard is five acres of community park land per 1,000 population. Recommended facilities and improvements include:

- ◆ Picnic tables with covers, and barbecue pits or grills
- ◆ Sidewalks and/or a natural walking trail
- ◆ Mountain biking trails with exercise stations (optional)
- ◆ Shade trees and native landscaping
- ◆ Drinking fountains
- ◆ Security lighting
- ◆ Multi-purpose open play areas

- ♦ Multi-purpose courts
- ♦ Playground equipment and playscape (for up to 50 children)
- ♦ Bicycle racks
- ♦ Perimeter fencing or landscaping
- ♦ Street signs indicating "children at play"
- ♦ Benches
- ♦ Trash receptacles and enclosures
- ♦ Curb cuts and crosswalks
- ♦ Tennis courts
- ♦ Basketball courts
- ♦ Softball and little league fields with bleachers
- ♦ Soccer/football fields with goals and goal posts
- ♦ Sand volleyball courts
- ♦ Swimming pool
- ♦ Covered pavilions
- ♦ Performance stage (optional)
- ♦ Restrooms
- ♦ Fencing for ball fields and athletic courts
- ♦ Concrete surface for a general play area
- ♦ Off-street parking

Figure 5.1 Illustrative Community Park



(Note the abundance of off-street parking)

### Community Park Locations

Community parks should be centrally located for convenience to all residents. They should have direct access to collector or arterial streets in order to handle special event traffic while avoiding neighborhood disruption. Community parks should include adequate off-street parking. The "ideal" service area radius of a community park is one mile. A community park that is located in or near a residential area usually serves a secondary role as a neighborhood park, as described below.

### Neighborhood Parks

Neighborhood parks should provide facilities and improvements that conveniently accommodate use by surrounding neighborhoods. Ease of access from adjacent neighborhoods, central location, and pedestrian/bicycle linkages are key considerations when developing neighborhood parks. They should be designed to accommodate the needs of all ages and, therefore, should have a blend of passive and active facilities.

Role of Neighborhood Parks

Neighborhood parks are intended to provide residents with ample opportunity for both passive and semi-active recreation activity. The method of determining the need for neighborhood parks is quite different from an assessment of need for community parks. Whereas community parks are designed for large-scale, area-wide events and activities, neighborhood parks are intended to meet the daily recreation needs of nearby residents. The level of activity is limited as a result of the size and location of these parks and the equipment and facilities available. A typical neighborhood park layout is displayed in **Figure 5.2, Illustrative Neighborhood Park**.

The size of neighborhood parks varies according to the availability of property, method and timing of acquisition, and intended use. National standards recommend a minimum neighborhood park size of five acres, assuming an adequate and even distribution across the community. Although a 10-acre park may accommodate ball fields and larger recreation and open space areas, two parks that are each five acres in size may equally, and perhaps better, serve the need, while providing a broader distribution of neighborhood parks.

Neighborhood Park Standards

The ideal neighborhood park should be between five and 10 acres, with an overall provision of one acre of neighborhood park per 1,000 residents. Recommended facilities and improvements include:

- ◆ Picnic tables with sheltering covers
- ◆ Barbecue pits
- ◆ Sidewalks and/or a natural walking trail
- ◆ Shade trees and landscaping
- ◆ Drinking fountain(s)
- ◆ Security lighting
- ◆ Multi-purpose open play area with multi-purpose play courts
- ◆ Playground equipment and/or a playscape (for up to 25 children)
- ◆ Perimeter fencing or landscaping with benches
- ◆ Restrooms
- ◆ Trash receptacles
- ◆ On- or off-street parking
- ◆ Curb cuts and crosswalks

It is important that a neighborhood park has toilet facilities. The lack of a restroom significantly limits the park's service radius and prevents it from accommodating organized recreation program activities or events, especially children's programs.

### Location of Neighborhood Parks

Neighborhood parks should be within a short walking distance (typically one-half mile or less) for the residents of one or more neighborhoods, thereby encouraging use and promoting convenience, ease of access, and walking safety for neighborhood children. Whenever possible, they should be located away from busy arterial streets and should not require any busy street crossings for access from their constituent neighborhoods.

Accomplishing this has been difficult in Huntsville, particularly in the more mature, built-up areas having grid street patterns.

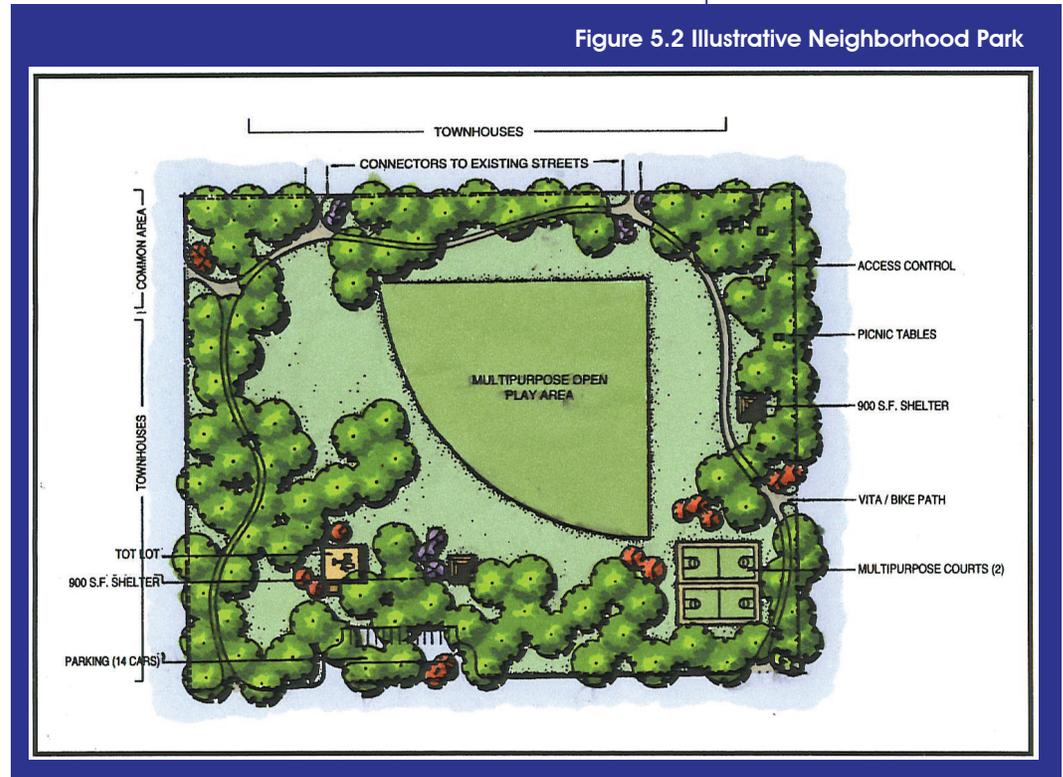
### Mini Parks

Mini parks are intended for active recreational use by nearby residents, such as within apartment complexes and residential subdivisions. There are no specific criteria to guide development of mini parks, although they should have facilities and improvements available to meet the identified needs of children living in the immediate area. The notable features that distinguish a mini park from a neighborhood park are its considerably smaller size and lack of restrooms.

### Role of Mini Parks

Mini parks serve the need of providing a minimum play area within minutes' walking distance of residents in the very immediate area. Unfortunately, mini parks in many communities are established to mitigate the need for a nearby neighborhood park. When this circumstance arises, the mini park often sustains heavy use and requires considerable maintenance. Facilities that are less than one-half acre in area are usually considered inefficient as they require nearly as much time for mowing and other routine maintenance tasks as a neighborhood

Figure 5.2 Illustrative Neighborhood Park





park. For this reason, many communities discourage the acquisition and development of truly small mini parks.

#### Mini Park Standards

As mentioned before, there are no specific size or facility standards for mini parks, but guidelines suggest that there should be one- to three-tenths acre per 1,000 residents on a community-wide basis. Recommended facilities and improvements might include:

- ◆ Picnic tables with covers
  - ◆ Perimeter sidewalks
  - ◆ Shade trees and native landscaping
  - ◆ Drinking fountain
  - ◆ Security lighting
  - ◆ Multi-purpose open play area
- ◆ Playground equipment (for up to 15 children)
  - ◆ Perimeter fencing or landscaping
  - ◆ Benches
  - ◆ On-street parking
  - ◆ Trash receptacles
  - ◆ Curb cuts and crosswalks

#### Location of Mini Parks

The most important criterion for mini park location is that it be situated on a local, low-traffic street with sidewalk or path access to the nearby residents it serves.

#### Open Space

Open space areas include reserved public lands dedicated as permanent open space. These lands are generally owned by the local government or dedicated through private instrument as a development reserve. They are typically undeveloped and used for informal activities. They may also serve as storm water collection areas during major storm events. Other examples of open space areas include easements for drainage basins, excess rights-of-way, greenways, and street esplanades.

#### Miscellaneous Facilities

There are many additional types of park and recreational facilities that fall outside of the classifications just described. Examples include:

- ♦ **Athletic Field Complexes.** Within the past 25 years, many cities have developed specialized, stand-alone facilities for baseball, softball and soccer. These include multiple fields, restrooms, refreshment stands, and an abundance of off-street parking. Usually situated on a major street, these facilities are particularly suited for organized league activities and are intensely used during summer evenings and portions of the weekend. In Huntsville, Kate Barr Ross Park falls within this category.
- ♦ **Recreation Centers.** The City does not own or maintain a dedicated recreation center. Instead, gymnasiums at some of the local school campuses are utilized for after-school sports clinics and programs.
- ♦ **Specialized Facilities.** Huntsville's Aquatic Center is an example of a specialized facility that will draw heavy use for a single type of activity. It will be City-owned and maintained by the Parks and Recreation Division upon completion.
- ♦ **Pathways and Trail Systems.** These facilities provide active recreation opportunities for hikers, bicyclists, casual walkers and joggers of all ages. Dedicated trails usually take advantage of natural stream corridors, abandoned railroad rights-of way, drainage courses, and open areas. Often a trail system includes dedicated lanes on existing streets as linkages between components of an off-road trail system. There is presently the Town Creek Trail, a loop through historic downtown Huntsville, intended for enjoyment by walkers during their lunch hour.
- ♦ **Historic Sites and Buildings.** Many communities get the opportunity to acquire, restore and operate specific historic sites and buildings. These include old mansions, railroad passenger stations, and similar landmark buildings. Often, these sites retain only limited use but have the opportunity to be integrated into the park and recreation system with expanded programming. Historic sites in Huntsville include Sam Houston's home and museum and the historic downtown.
- ♦ **Nature and Interpretive Centers.** These areas usually include facilities that are oriented toward a specific ecological feature such as a natural prairie or wetland, unusual geologic features, or a scenic vista. Uses are specific and of low intensity. These facilities usually do not integrate with other elements of a park system, except for the trail system. There is an interpretive center



Elkins Lake in south Huntsville offers an example of a recreational and aesthetic amenity integrated into a private development.

currently under construction at Eastham-Thomason Park, across from the entrance to Samuel Walker Houston Elementary.

- ♦ **Facilities for Persons with Special Needs.** Many communities are developing specialized facilities that support activities for persons with disabilities and special needs. In most cases, these facilities and activities are located within or adjacent to an existing community park, neighborhood park or trail system rather than on its own site.
- ♦ **Campgrounds.** Some municipalities, and more often counties, support publicly-owned campgrounds. This occurs particularly in areas that attract an abundance of tourists. This is applicable as it relates to both Sam Houston National Forest and Huntsville State Park. These parks attract visitors to explore East Texas and the Huntsville area year round.
- ♦ **Golf Courses.** Many cities of Huntsville’s size or larger own and operate full-size municipal golf courses designed for public play. While activities are limited only to golf, a municipal course can become a valuable contributor to the community’s open space system and can enhance the aesthetics of an entrance to the city. Many public municipal golf courses throughout the U.S. were once privately owned, either as commercial facilities or as country clubs, and were subsequently purchased by the municipality in order to enable continuation of play and as a measure to preserve valuable open space from development. Public golf courses in Huntsville include Country Campus (9 hole) and Raven Nest (18 hole), and nearby in Trinity there is Lake Estates (9 hole) and Westwood Shores (18 hole).

**FACILITY DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES**

As parks and recreation sites are evaluated for acquisition and development, it is important for the City to have a standardized list of facilities and equipment desired for each type of park (such as outlined in the park classification section above) to assess the development feasibility of each site. There are important considerations in developing parks including the size, shape and orientation of the site; pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular access and parking; adjoining land use; development constraints such as grades, poor drainage and flooding; environmental impacts; and the anticipated use of the park. In assessing the feasibility of a site, each of these considerations is important.

**Table 5.1, Facility Development Guidelines,** provides general guidelines for developing activity areas and improvements within a park facility. It identifies the requisite space and dimensional requirements, orientation, applicable service radius, and generally required per capita units. Of note in this table is the current NRPA standard of one soccer field per 10,000 persons. This appears to be too low for many communities as the popularity of organized children's soccer programs has increased significantly in recent years. Therefore, a more accurate standard is one field per 5,000 residents.

**Table 5.1, Facility Development Guidelines**

Activity/ Facility	Required Space	Size and Dimensions	Orientation	Units per Population	Service Radius	Location Notes
<b>Basketball</b>						
Youth	2,400-3,036 sq. ft.	46'- 50' x 84'	Long axis north- south.	1 per 10,000 persons.	¼ - ½ mile.	Outdoor courts in neighborhood and community parks, plus active recreation areas in other park settings.
High School	5,040-7,280 sq. ft.	50' x 84'				
Collegiate	5,600-7,980 sq. ft.	50' x 84'				
Soccer	1.7 - 2.1 acres.	195' to 225' x 330' to 360' with a minimum clearance of 10' on all sides.	Fall season -- long axis northwest to southeast. For longer periods, north to south.	1 per 10,000 persons. This standard needs to be discussed further.	1 - 2 miles.	Number of units depends on popularity. Youth soccer on smaller fields adjacent to schools or neighborhood parks.
Tennis	Minimum of 7,200 sq. ft. for a single court (2 acres for a complex).	36' x 78'; 12' clearance on both sides; 21' clearance on both ends.	Long axis north- south.	1 court per 2,000 persons.	¼ - ½ mile.	Best in batteries of 2 to 4. Located in neighborhood/ community park or adjacent to a school site.
Volleyball	Minimum 4,000 sq. ft.	30' x 60'. Minimum 6' clearance on all sides.	Long axis north- south.	1 court per 5,000 persons.	¼ - ½ mile.	Same as other court activities (e.g. badminton, basketball, etc.).
Football	Minimum 1.5 acres.	160' x 360' with a minimum of 6' clearance on all sides.	Fall season -- long axis northwest to southeast. For longer periods, north to south.	1 per 20,000 persons.	15 - 30 minutes travel time.	Usually part of baseball, football, soccer complex in community park or adjacent to high school.
Multiple-Use Recreation Court (basketball, volleyball, tennis)	9,840 sq. ft.	120' x 80'	Long axis of courts with primary use is north-south.	1 per 10,000 persons.	1 - 2 miles.	In neighborhood or community parks.
Open Space	Minimum of 40 percent undeveloped per park.	N/A	N/A	5 acres per 1,000 persons.	30 minute travel time.	Within neighborhood and community parks or stand-alone.

**Table 5.1, Facility Development Guidelines (continued)**

Activity / Facility	Required Space	Size and Dimensions	Orientation	Units per Population	Service Radius	Location Notes
1/4 Mile Running Track	4.3 acres.	Overall width - 276'. Length - 600.02'. Track width for 8, 4'-lanes is 32'.	Long axis in sector from north to south to northwest to southeast with finish line at northerly end.	1 per 20,000 persons.	15 - 30 minute travel time.	Usually part of high school or in community park complex in combination with baseball, soccer, etc.
Baseball						
Official	3.0 - 3.85 acres minimum.	Baselines -- 90'. Pitching distance -- 60-1/2'. Foul lines -- 320' min. Center field -- 400'+.	Locate home plate so the pitcher is throwing across the sun and the batter is not facing it. Line from home plate through pitcher's mound runs east-northeast.	1 per 5,000 persons.	¼ - ½ mile.	Part of neighborhood complex. Lighted fields should be part of a community park or sports complex.
Little League	1.2 acres minimum.	Baselines -- 60'. Foul lines -- 200'. Center field -- 200'-250'.	Same as baseball.	Lighted – 1 per 30,000 persons.		
Softball	1.5 - 2.0 acres.	Baselines -- 60'. Pitching distance -- 46' min.; 40' -- women.  Fast pitch field radius from plate -- 225' between foul lines, slow pitch -- 275', men; 250', women.	Same as baseball.	1 per 5,000 persons (if also used for youth baseball).	¼ - ½ mile.	Slight difference in dimensions for 16" slow pitch. May also be used for youth baseball.
Trails	N/A	Maximum 10' width, maximum average grade 5% not to exceed 15%. Capacity: Rural trails -- 40 hikers/day/mile. Urban trails -- 90 hikers/day/mile.	N/A	1 system per region.	N/A	Located in greenways, natural areas and parks, and along drainage ways, levees and utility easements. Their purpose is to accommodate walkers, joggers and bicyclists away from traffic.

Source: Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines, National Recreation and Parks Association, 1995.

### HUNTSVILLE PARKS

#### Locations

The location of City of Huntsville parks and other recreation facilities are displayed in **Figures 5.3a-b, Park Service Areas**. A summary listing of these facilities is shown in **Table 5.2, Huntsville Parks & Recreation Facilities**. This does not include facilities maintained by either Huntsville Independent School District or Walker County.

#### Facility Inventory

Integral to future park planning is a thorough evaluation of the existing system. The foundation for establishing an adequate, “first-class” parks and recreation system begins with the availability, location and condition of the existing City-owned parks and recreation areas. In determining the need for additional parkland, recreational facilities and park-related improvements, the first step is to assess the level of sufficiency of the existing parks in meeting the needs of the community. This assessment is done first by comparing the acreage of parks to standards for cities of comparable size and, secondly, by soliciting the input of citizens. Each park must also be evaluated in terms of its proximity to its users, its safety and accessibility, the availability and condition of its equipment and facilities, and its utilization.

The City currently offers an assortment of parks that provide opportunities for a typical variety of activities, as displayed in Table 5.2. Huntsville currently has an inventory of 23 parks owned and maintained by the City, representing a total of 240.88 acres of land. The acreage is divided into:

- ◆ four community parks offering 196.19 acres;
- ◆ six neighborhood parks totaling 25.85 acres;
- ◆ there are no true mini parks, so these sites have been combined with the green space/undeveloped category from the City’s earlier master plan to total seven small parks that contribute an additional 3.63 acres to the City’s park inventory;
- ◆ one joint use facility (New Edition Park, +/- two acres);
- ◆ a special use facility (the new Aquatic Center), contributing an additional six acres; and,
- ◆ the Sam Houston Statue Park and visitor’s center along the east side of Interstate 45 (accessible from State Highway 75 South) in south Huntsville, contributing 5.78 acres.

**Table 5.2  
Huntsville Parks & Recreation Facilities**

<i>Community Parks</i>	
Eastham-Thomason	150.00
Kate Barr Ross	29.79
Emancipation	10.4
Thomas Henry Ball (Josey)	6.00
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>196.19</b>
<i>Neighborhood Parks</i>	
Boettcher Mill	0.75
Bush-Miller	3.66
Emma Etheredge	14.00
Pineview	1.91
Sandbrook	1.6
Gibbs	4.09
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>25.85</b>
<i>“Mini” Parks</i>	
Forest Hills	0.64
Founder Spring	0.68
Gillaspie	0.25
J. H. Rather	0.57
Pine Shadows	0.95
Smither	0.35
Town Creek	0.18
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>3.63</b>
<i>Undeveloped</i>	
Bayou Bend	2.27
Elks	0.27
Raven Terrace	2.21
West Hill	2.46
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>7.21</b>
<i>Special Use</i>	
Aquatic Center	6.00
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>6.00</b>
<i>Joint Use Facilities</i>	
New Edition	+/- 2.00
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>+/-2.00</b>
<b>Total Park Acreage</b>	<b>240.88</b>

Community Parks

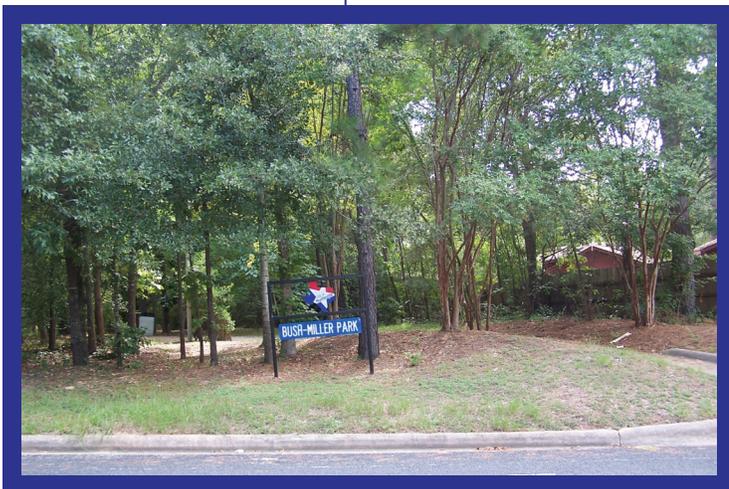


Huntsville's four community parks total 196.19 acres. While somewhat small for this classification, with the exception of Eastham-Thomason Park, they are concentrated primarily in north-central Huntsville. Because they are located within residential areas, they each do double duty as neighborhood parks.

- ◆ **Eastham-Thomason:** This is considered the Central Park of Huntsville. It is 150 acres and, unlike other park facilities where there has been little to no change since the last master plan, some improvements have been made at this park. These include the addition of a dog park and new parking lot and relocation of a volleyball court. An interpretive center is currently under construction.
- ◆ **Kate Barr Ross:** At the time of the 2003 Master Plan, this was described as the most developed park in the system. This park is where most soccer, softball and baseball leagues play for all age groups. It is 29.79 acres, located on the east side of North U.S. 75 and North 11<sup>th</sup> Street. The swimming pool and bath house have both been closed to the public.
- ◆ **Emancipation:** This park is 10.4 acres, located in Ward 3 west of Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard. Amenities include basketball courts, picnic tables, playground area, horseshoe pits, and off-street parking for 100-plus vehicles.
- ◆ **Thomas Henry Ball (Josey):** This is a six-acre park that offers, according to the last master plan, a ball field and basketball court. The restrooms are in need of repair.

Neighborhood Parks

Huntsville's six neighborhood parks, totaling 25.85 acres, are scattered throughout northern and central Huntsville. All are quite small based on neighborhood park standards as none exceeds four acres.



- ◆ **Boettcher Mill:** This 0.75 acre park is located at the corner of Avenue B and Boettcher Mill Road in east Huntsville. The park has a play structure appropriate for ages 5-12 and a picnic table.
- ◆ **Bush-Miller:** This park was donated to Huntsville Natural and Cultural Resources in 1989. The property is 3.6 acres and located between Normal Park and Hickory south of Crosstimbers. This park has a lighted gravel walking trail, the length of which is presently unconfirmed.
- ◆ **Emma Etheredge:** This park traverses the creek between two neighborhood streets in the Spring

Lake Subdivision. It is 14 acres and, according to the last master plan, it centers along a stream that feeds into a neighborhood lake. Amenities include swings, a slide, spring toys, picnic tables and a barbecue grill.

- ♦ **(Thomas Clifton) Gibbs:** This park is an undeveloped four-acre plot located at the northwest corner of Avenue S and 19<sup>th</sup> Street. It is bounded by a creek on the west. The dedication statement reads: “This property shall be developed, utilized and maintained as a passive pastoral park for the enjoyment of the citizens of Huntsville, and the development of the property shall be restricted to activities which take advantage of the area’s natural topography and vegetation.”
- ♦ **Pineview:** This park is 1.9 acres. It is adjacent to Sam Houston State University and built along a drainage basin at Avenue N-½ and Pineview Drive. Amenities include swings, a picnic table, park bench, a spring toy and a climbing structure.
- ♦ **Sandbrook:** Located at the south end of Clay Circle (a cul-de-sac), this park is 1.6 acres and provides a swing set, spring toys, picnic tables and barbecue grills.

### Mini Parks

Huntsville has seven mini parks that total 3.63 acres.

- ♦ **Forest Hills:** This is a small 0.64-acre lot. Classified as a neighborhood park by the City, it would be more appropriate to classify it as a mini park based on its size and amenities which include swings, a play structure, two picnic tables and a barbecue grill. The park is triangular in shape and surrounded by residential neighborhoods.
- ♦ **Founder Spring:** Located just north of downtown, this is a mini park of less than an acre (0.688 acres). It includes a park bench and an historic marker describing the Huntsville Springs.
- ♦ **Gillaspie:** Located at Avenue I and 9<sup>th</sup> Street, this park is 0.25 acres and has a historic marker and bleacher seating. It was classified as a passive park in the last master plan, but it would be more appropriate to classify it as a mini park based on the acreage and amenities.
- ♦ **(John Henry) J. H. Rather:** Just over half an acre (0.57), this park is located at the northeast corner of 13<sup>th</sup> Street and University Avenue. It is called a “temporary” City park facility and has been designated an “Art Park.” It was classified as a neighborhood park in the last master plan, but it would be more appropriate to call this a mini park based on its size and amenities.
- ♦ **Pine Shadows:** This park is a wooded, 0.95-acre site that, according to the last master plan, is located within the flood plain. It offers picnic tables, a swing set, barbecue grill and fountain. This park was classified as a neighborhood park in the last master plan, but it would be more appropriate to classify it as a mini park based on the acreage and amenities.

- ♦ **Smither:** This park is 0.35 acres and is located between a residential neighborhood and the Interstate 45 east service road. It offers a picnic table, park bench and a scattering of sculptures along a walking path. This park was classified as a neighborhood park in the last master plan, but it would be more appropriate to classify it as a mini park based on its size.
- ♦ **Town Creek:** This park is 0.18 acres, located at Avenue M and 12<sup>th</sup> Street. It offers a foot bridge crossing Town Creek. This park was classified as a neighborhood park in the last master plan, but it would be more appropriate to classify it as a mini park based on the acreage and amenities.

### Undeveloped Parks

The City has 7.2 acres of undeveloped parkland. This includes:

- ♦ **Bayou Bend:** This is essentially a vacant drainage area, encompassing 2.27 acres at the northeast corner of Normal Park and Magnolia Way. Classified as a neighborhood park in the last master plan, it would be more appropriate to classify it as an undeveloped park. There are no amenities at this site, and it is difficult to maintain due to its location.
- ♦ **Elks:** This is an undeveloped 0.27-acre parcel that is divided by a drainage easement. As a result, it is often wet and difficult to maintain.
- ♦ **Raven Terrace:** This is a 2.2-acre parcel that was classified as a “green space” in the last master plan. No improvements have been made since then. This park is located adjacent to Raven Terrace Mobile Home Park on State Highway 30 East.
- ♦ **West Hill:** This is an undeveloped 2.46-acre drainage area adjacent to Wal-Mart on Commerce Plaza, within the West Hill subdivision. It is undeveloped in large part because it is very difficult to access. It was classified as a “green space” in the last master plan. For the purposes of this chapter it was classified as undeveloped.

### Green Belts and Trails

The City maintains 12.75 miles of walking/biking/hiking/jogging/nature trails. Many of these are concentrated at a single park, Eastham-Thomason Park.

### Special Facilities

The City of Huntsville is in the process of building a new aquatic center financed through a grant from the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, funds designated by the City of Huntsville, and contributions from local citizens. The new facility will feature a zero-depth



recreational leisure pool with a tube slide and other play elements, an eight-lane competition pool, and a picnic area. The facility will contribute six acres to the City's park inventory.

### Joint Use of School Facilities

School playgrounds, athletic fields and courts can provide additional park and recreation areas and, if accessible to the public, help to enhance the number and availability of neighborhood parks within the City. The sharing of these public resources also facilitates greater efficiency and minimizes duplication. The City and Huntsville ISD concluded a new formal cooperation agreement, building upon past partnership arrangements, during the time this Comprehensive Plan was being prepared.

As illustrated by Figure 5.3, the school sites would contribute to the service area coverage of the City's neighborhood parks. While there would be some degree of overlap, the school facilities would serve some areas that are not well served by existing neighborhood park facilities. One local example is:

- ♦ **New Edition:** This park is approximately two acres, located north of U.S. Highway 90 East at Elm Street. According to the 2003 Master Plan, this park is the property of Huntsville Independent School District (HISD) and accessible through a joint-use agreement after school hours. The gymnasium is available through the YMCA for basketball practices and games.

Joint use of facilities and inter-jurisdictional agreements reap benefits for all parties and may also result in the establishment of park and recreation facilities in unincorporated areas.

### Regional Recreational Opportunities

While other regional facilities are not a direct factor in analysis of the City of Huntsville's current and potential future park system, it is recognized that area residents and visitors benefit from unique recreational and open space assets in very close proximity to Huntsville.

#### Huntsville State Park

Huntsville State Park is a 2,083-acre recreational area, six miles southwest of Huntsville, in Walker County. It was acquired by deeds from private owners in 1937 and was opened in 1938. A natural disaster occurred early in the park's history. Twelve inches of rain fell within two days, flooding the area and causing the dam spillway to collapse. Estimates to repair the damage ran into hundreds of thousands of dollars, with nothing approaching the needed amount available.

Ultimately, the Huntsville-Walker County Chamber of Commerce dedicated and opened Huntsville State Park to the public on Friday, May 18, 1956. <sup>iii</sup>

### Sam Houston National Forest

Sam Houston National Forest, one of four national forests in Texas, is located 50 miles north of Houston. The national forest designation encompasses 163,037 acres between Huntsville, Conroe, Cleveland and Richards, Texas. With land in Montgomery, Walker and San Jacinto counties, the Sam Houston National Forest is intermingled with privately-owned timber lands and small farms.<sup>iv</sup>

### Lone Star Hiking Trail

The 128-mile Lone Star Hiking Trail, a portion of which has gained National Recreation Trail status, winds through the Sam Houston National Forest. The trail, marked with two-inch by four-inch aluminum markers to guide hikers, offers recreation areas at three different points. The trail consists of four major sections: (1) the 40-mile Lake Conroe section, lying west of Lake Conroe, begins near the intersection of FS 219 and FM 149 and has four connecting loops; (2) the Central Area of the trail runs eastward from Stubblefield Recreation Area, through the Four Notch area to Evergreen and then south down FM 945 to the trailhead parking lot; (3) the Four Notch Loop, a 9.2-mile section, is in the middle of this 60-mile area of trail; and (4) the Winters Bayou/Tarkington Creek Area of the trail runs from FM 945 east to Double Lake Recreation Area, then south through Big Creek Scenic Area and then southwest through Winters Bayou. This 27-mile section of the trail has National Recreation Trail status. The Lone Star Hiking Trail may be hiked year round, but winter and spring are the most popular seasons due to the mild southeast Texas climate. During deer hunting season in November and December, hikers should wear highly visible clothing. Usually the trail is not crowded, and hikers may observe a multiple-use managed forest with many ages and kinds of trees, plants and wildlife. Trail visitors may also view rivers, creeks, lakes and streams that meander through and around the Sam Houston National Forest. Off-road vehicles are prohibited.<sup>v</sup>

## **NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

### **Resources versus Needs**

A combination of a standard-based and demand-based approach was used to assess the need for additional parks and recreation areas and facilities within Huntsville. The demand-based approach entails input from the City's Parks and Recreation Department staff, as well as input gained from residents through citizen participation activities during the course of this planning process.

Using the published standards of the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), the acreages of parks and recreation areas currently recommended for

Huntsville are as displayed in **Table 5.3, Recommended Area Standards**. The potential need for additional parks and recreation acreage to satisfy current demands is determined by applying the recommended standards to the current population of the City.

As shown in Table 5.3, based on a population of 36,006 persons, (including 12,305 students and 23,701 residents and excluding institutionalized persons) the total park acreage Huntsville

**Table 5.3 Recommended Area Standards**

Class	Standard	Low	High	Recommended
Community	3 to 5 acres/1,000 persons	108	180	144
Neighborhood	1 to 3 acres/1,000 persons	36	108	72
Mini	0.1 to 0.3 acres/1,000 persons	4	11	8
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>148</b>	<b>299</b>	<b>224</b>

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative

should have today ranges from approximately 148 to 299 acres. The overall suggested standard, which is based on the average of the low and high columns in the table, is for a total of 224 acres of community, neighborhood and mini parks.

The City currently maintains 240.88 acres of parks and recreation areas in the three specified categories plus a pending aquatic center, a joint use facility shared with the school district, and undeveloped or passive parkland. Therefore, based on the park acreage available to the community today, the City has a surplus of roughly 17 acres in its amount of public parkland. The challenge for the City is that various parks in its current inventory are either small or difficult to access and maintain due to poor location (with some in drainage areas). Some sites cannot be developed much at all under the terms by which the City acquired them. Some are impractical as public parks because of their inaccessibility and difficulty of providing parking and other basic improvements.

In considering this population-based park system assessment, it should be noted that the local TDCJ prison population is excluded from the City’s population. University students who reside in the community are part of the population count. In their case, they are likely to use City parks during their time in Huntsville, perhaps even more regularly than the average resident.

Displayed in **Table 5.4, Existing Acreage vs. Future Demands**, is a tabulation of the recommended park supply necessary to support the existing population plus a projected future resident and non-commuting student population of 45,529 persons. Of the recommended acreages according to NRPA standards, Huntsville is currently deficient in each of the three park categories. The total acreage needed to support the projected population ranges from 188 to 379 acres. Based on the overall suggested

Table 5.4 Existing Acreage vs. Future Demands

Class	Standard	Low	High	Recommended
Community	3 to 5 acres/1,000 persons	137	228	183
Neighborhood	1 to 3 acres/1,000 persons	46	137	92
Mini	0.1 to 0.3 acres/1,000 persons	5	14	10
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>188</b>	<b>379</b>	<b>285</b>

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative

standard of 285 acres, the City is projected to need an additional 44 acres of developed park areas by the Year 2025.

From a land area standpoint, Huntsville’s park system appears

deficient. There are, however, significant factors that compensate for this:

- There is an abundance of regional outdoor recreational opportunities near Huntsville – most noteworthy are Huntsville State Park and the Sam Houston National Forest.
- Sam Houston State University student enrollments, which are included in the Census population, skew the statistics, though it would be inappropriate to omit students from the calculations as they are also local park users, particularly the many students who live off-campus and within the community.

Nevertheless, the need for more park land is made apparent by the heavy utilization of existing parks, the frequency of needed trash collections, and the demand for new ball fields and special facilities. Overstressed parks require higher maintenance and more frequent replacement of facilities.

### Service Area Coverage

Depicted in Figures 5.3a-b are service area buffers around all existing parks and school playgrounds, with a varying buffer radius depending upon the park classification. From a purely locational standpoint, preliminary analysis indicates that much of central and north-central Huntsville has convenient access to City parks. However, park coverage is lacking in lesser-developed portions of far west and north Huntsville and particularly in outlying, but incorporated, areas of east and south Huntsville.

### Opportunities and Constraints

Citizens would like to see improvements made to Huntsville’s park system. It is clear that more lands are needed and that the City should take advantage of every available opportunity to supplement the system. The planning process must also give realistic consideration to the system’s limitations.

### Opportunities

Current enhancement opportunities for the Huntsville park system include:

- ◆ Expansion of the Town Creek Trail walking path through downtown to include the surrounding residential communities.
- ◆ An updated joint-use agreement with the Huntsville Independent School District to enable use of their facilities after school hours in exchange for maintenance and upkeep.
- ◆ Review and revision of the current parkland dedication ordinance and payment-in-lieu options. The ordinance provisions should ensure that candidate property for dedication is accessible and truly developable as parkland. The City should have as a goal to avoid “low/difficult” acreages in its park inventory.

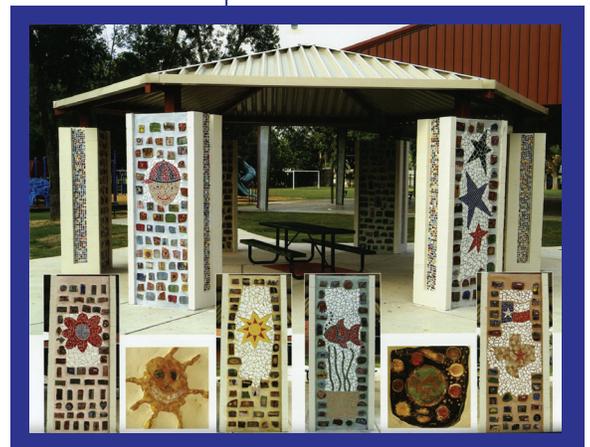
### Constraints

The major constraints to future park development, in addition to typical funding challenges, include:

- ◆ It is extremely difficult to create cohesion of the community with Interstate 45 traversing the City. The portion of Huntsville west of I-45 is lacking in parks, and establishing bike paths or trail connections is challenging.
- ◆ The general terrain of the area is challenging due to the dense natural vegetation and drainage situation.
- ◆ The current parkland dedication ordinance requires 10 percent from a developer, and these set-asides have frequently been those portions of a site that are most difficult to access and therefore impractical as public parks.

## ARTS AND CULTURE

Huntsville has an active Arts Commission that could be called on to play a more direct role in the upgrading of the community’s current and future park inventory. The City commissioned the Huntsville 2020 Cultural Planning Project, a report that examined issues important to the community such as: beautiful grounds/walking paths, safe accessible “family” gathering spaces, and outdoor concerts and events. The report, completed in 1992, stated that the Downtown project has sparked an interest in the further development of a “public aesthetic.” Despite being almost 15 years old, the issues it raised are still relevant to Huntsville today.



One key to revitalizing a failing or under-utilized park is to create community involvement, and the arts provide an ideal tool. Arts activities can attract large numbers of people to a park, especially at night when the space may have

**Arts, Culture and Historic Resources Chapter**

In recognition of the value of the arts and culture, the CPAC(X) recommends the addition of a new chapter to this plan, as titled above. This is intended to be an update to the Huntsville 2020 Cultural Planning Project. The timing of this plan element is to be within year one of the implementation program.

previously been considered too dangerous. The arts can also highlight the park’s potential to be a vital community asset. There are a number of programs that have been initiated in communities around the country where Huntsville can look for inspiration. Some examples include:

**Houston, Texas SPARK School Park Program.** The SPARK School Park Program was developed in 1983 as a way to increase park space in Houston. Former Houston School Board Member and City Council Member Eleanor Tinsley created SPARK to develop public school grounds into neighborhood parks. An inter-local agreement, one of the first in Houston, between the City, the Houston Parks Board and the Houston Independent School District, formally established the SPARK Program, and in 1991 SPARK was granted 501(c)(3) status. Each school selected is given a goal of raising \$5,000 for its park. Penny drives, bake sales, school carnivals, candy sales, spaghetti dinners, "buy a brick" drives, rummage sales and innumerable other events are staged to generate the funds. Classes volunteer to care for trees planted in the parks. Local businesses often help with in-kind contributions. Architects, landscape architects, artists and businesses are solicited for their professional contributions through the parents, spouses and teachers at the school. More than 85 of the 180 SPARK parks have public art components. About half of the projects are proposed and completed by art teachers at the schools. When there is no art teacher, a local artist is recruited to work with the students and architect on a project. The artwork often reflects the heritage of the neighborhood, a specific theme, the school mascot, and/or the school motto.

**Corpus Christi, Texas “Percent for Art” Ordinance.** The City of Corpus Christi passed the “Percent for Art” Ordinance in 1987, for the purpose of ensuring that art is incorporated into every public improvement project with a budget of \$50,000 or more throughout the City. This ordinance requires that the City accept responsibility for: expanding the opportunities for the citizens to experience art in public places; recognizing the substantial economic benefits to be gained through the provision of cultural amenities; and encouraging the inclusion of works of art in private developments in the City. To qualify, a project must have a budget of more than \$50,000 and include new construction or remodeling of a building, parking facility, park, arterial street, sidewalk or any portion thereof.

**Austin, Texas Art in Public Places.** For over two decades, the City of Austin Art in Public Places program has made it possible for talented artists of local and national renown to enhance public spaces throughout the City with works of art ranging from outdoor sculptures and murals to functional



works integrated into architecture. Artists have successfully incorporated traditions, objects and physical marks of community members to create cultural landmarks that have become cornerstones of community identity. The City of Austin was the first municipality in Texas to make a commitment to include works of art in construction projects when it established the Art in Public Places program in 1985. By ordinance, one percent of a project budget must be allocated to commission or purchase art for public sites such as the airport, convention center, libraries, parks, police stations and recreation centers. The Austin Arts Commission provides oversight and appoints a seven-member Art in Public Places Panel composed of respected local visual arts and design professionals to make program recommendations. The Art in Public Places Panel and staff work closely with project architects and City department and community representatives. This is to ensure that the Art in Public Places Collection includes high quality works of art that represent the broad range of media, styles and cultural sensibilities that contribute to Austin's distinctive ambiance<sup>vi</sup>.

<sup>i</sup> "How cities use parks for ... Economic Development"; City Parks Forum Briefing Papers; American Planning Association; 2002.

<sup>ii</sup> "How cities use parks for ... Green Infrastructure"; City Parks Forum Briefing Papers; American Planning Association; 2003.

<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/spdest/findadest/parks/huntsville/>

<sup>iv</sup> [http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/texas/recreation/sam\\_houston/samhouston\\_gen\\_info.shtml](http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/texas/recreation/sam_houston/samhouston_gen_info.shtml)

<sup>v</sup> [http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/texas/recreation/sam\\_houston/samhouston\\_gen\\_info.shtml](http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/texas/recreation/sam_houston/samhouston_gen_info.shtml)

<sup>vi</sup> <http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/aipp/about.htm>

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