

SECTION 8. PARKS PLAN

Introduction

The purpose of the Parks Plan is to provide a framework for the development of the existing parks system based on a solid understanding of a number of factors and their impact on parks planning. These factors include:

- Existing and future population projections
- Desires of the community
- Past parks planning, efforts and research
- Existing and future financing
- Accepted standards in park development, types and service areas

This framework will provide a clear picture of the existing status of the parks system from a comparative standpoint, its challenges and the priorities and recommendations that will most accurately address these challenges.

To address these challenges and provide recommendations, it is critical to understand the overall goal of what the parks system is meant to do. The parks system is to contribute to the overall quality of life in the community by providing resources to allow for recreational and social activities and relief from the urban environment. The parks system, from its inception in older and larger industrial cities and beyond, was to be the “lungs of the city”: an escape from the built environment, and the associated stresses of modern day life, to the natural environment. Levelland is no exception. The sections below will define, by national standards and the specific concerns of Levelland’s citizens, what the most advantageous and achievable parks system will be.

Parks planning should be rooted in an understanding of what the community desires measured against available funding.

8.1 Past Park Planning Efforts

In 1997, a Parks Plan was initiated by the City for the purposes just explained in Section 8.1. From this Parks Plan came valuable research in a number of different areas:

- An overview of the existing parks system
- How the parks system measured against nationally accepted standards
- Desires and concerns of the citizens

- Specific concerns and conditions of individual parks or park facilities
- Financial conditions and challenges
- Other factors like donated land for parks use

Much of this research is still valuable and relevant in 2003. In the 1997 plan Levelland's existing park system compared favorably to national standards set up by the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) in most categories. The principal exception to meeting these standards was the lack of a neighborhood park in a developing residential area in the east side of town. With the assistance of donated land and a grant from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) this deficiency was addressed with the development of George C. Price Park. Other exceptions to meeting NRPA standards involved shortages in playgrounds, walking trails, and picnic facilities. While the development of George C. Price Park addressed these needs to some extent, additional progress will be made in 2004 as Lobo Lake Park is improved, again with TPWD grant assistance. This project will involve adding a walking trail, a picnic pavilion, and modifying Lobo hill to provide a grassed seating area so that the picnic pavilion can double as an outdoor stage. Also, an 18 hole disc golf course has been added to City Park, further solidifying this park as an excellent recreational resource for the entire city.

To some extent, NRPA standards are further exceeded given the accessibility of recreational parks and land owned by the Levelland Independent School District and the South Plains College. Many of these amenities are available to all citizens after school hours provided the facilities are not in use for official school activities. As a general rule, outdoor amenities are open to the public (with the above described restrictions) and indoor amenities like gymnasiums are not. Table 8.1 below is an updated breakdown from the 1997 Parks Plan of Levelland schools and their respective facilities and when they are available.¹ An asterisk (*) denotes amenities that are open to the public after school hours and when not in use for official school activities:

Generally, Levelland fares well against park standards determined by the National Recreation and Parks Association. The school district has been a major contributor to this standards assessment.

¹ Telephone Interview. Bob Martin, Superintendent. Levelland Independent School District. November 11, 2003.

Table 8.1 Recreational Amenities, Levelland Independent School District (2003)

Recreational Type	Name of School							
	Cactus Elem.	Capitol Elem.	South Elem.	West Elem.	Carver Center	Middle School	Junior High	High School
indoor gymnasium	1	1	1	1	1	x	x	x
playground w/ equip.*	1	2	2	1	2	x	x	x
multi-purpose fields*	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	2
basketball court-outside*	1	x	1	1	x	x	x	x
tennis courts*	x	1	x	x	x	x	4	x
football field and track	x	x	x	x	x	1	x	x
basketball court-inside	x	x	x	x	x	1	2	2
weight lifting room	x	x	x	x	x	1	x	x
Baseball field	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	1
Picnic area w/ Gazebo*	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	1
softball field*	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	1
multi-purpose field w/ track	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	1

* Facility is available to general public after school hours and while not in use for official school activities

Based on past parks planning conducted in 1970 and 1986, an inventory of accomplishments based on recommendations from those years was taken. The City had fared well and the value of past parks planning was proven. Left to be accomplished were landscaping improvements along the railroad right-of-way, a mandatory park dedication ordinance and the establishment of a new park for the eastern half of the City (since completed with the development of George C. Price Park). According to findings, the parks most heavily used were the City Park and Breshear Lake Park.

In terms of its citizens and input given in focus groups, the following comments were provided in 1997:

- Additional trails are needed
- Improvements to the mountain at Lobo Park are needed, possibly to accommodate a gazebo or picnic facilities
- Lobo Lake Park is an asset to the downtown area and as such should be a priority for improvements (to include landscaping, additional picnic areas, lighting)
- A variety of new facilities were recommended: tennis courts, a new pool, additional picnic facilities and a public golf course or driving range

Based on these and other comments, the City created a priorities list for parks improvements. Several of these priorities were accomplished and an updated priority list was created in 1999:

Highest Priority

- Develop Lobo Lake Park as a Downtown Focal Point (accomplished-in development)

High Priority

- Improve Walking at Lobo Lake Park (accomplished-in development)

Moderate Priority

- More picnic facilities (accomplished-in development)
- More walking trails (accomplished-in development)
- More playgrounds
- A new park to serve the North Park area

Priority

- Tennis Courts
- Security Lighting to Reduce Vandalism
- Landscape City Pool
- Cover for City Pool
- Install Paving at R. V. Park
- Excavate Playa at L. G. Griffin Park
- Reduce Civic Center Rates
- Speed Control in City Park
- Rename City Park
- Programs for Adults
- Enlarge Breshear Lake Park
- Pool on East Side of Town
- Public Gymnasium
- Golf Course

The level of priority assigned was based on need but mainly on the availability of funding. As such, potential funding sources were sighted and included state and federal funds, local government funds, private foundations, and private donations. Noteworthy was a particularly

successful program that generated roughly \$21,000/annually through an option listed on all utility bills to dedicate \$1 to parks funding.

8.2 Park Classifications

The following is a description of various park types and the specific associated parks that may be found in Levelland. For a graphic depiction of Levelland parks, refer to Plate 8.1 *Future Parks Plan* on the following page.

Mini-Park

A mini-park is a small area (roughly ½ block) generally used as a children's playground or as a passive or aesthetic area by senior citizens. Mini-parks are designed to serve a very small population area and are often owned or maintained by a property association, such as a homeowners association. These parks normally serve a population base of 500 to 1,000 persons, and although they range in size, they are typically about one acre. The primary function and use of this type of park is generally to provide recreational space for preschool-age children and elementary school-age children near their residences. Where substantial development of high-density apartments is proposed, it is appropriate that mini-parks be incorporated as part of the high-density development. Any future development of mini-parks should be private in nature, as should ownership and maintenance responsibilities. These parks, although they should be used to calculate the amount of park acreage a community has, are generally not conducive to ownership by municipalities due primarily to required maintenance costs. 4th Street Park and 17th Street Park are both examples of mini-parks.



17th Street Park

17th Street Park is an example of a Mini-Park.

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Neighborhood Park

The neighborhood park, sometimes referred to as a playground, is generally thought of as one of the most important features of a park system, and is often considered to be one of the major cohesive elements in neighborhood design. Its primary function is the provision of recreational space for the neighborhood that surrounds it. When it is possible to combine an elementary school with this type of park, the two features further enhance the identity of the neighborhood by providing a central location for recreation and education, and by providing a significant open space feature within the neighborhood. A neighborhood park should be located near the center of the neighborhood, and should have a service area of approximately one and a half miles. Safe and convenient pedestrian access via sidewalks or trails is important to a neighborhood park location. Generally, the location should not be adjacent to a heavily traveled major thoroughfare. Facilities normally provided at a neighborhood park consist of the following:

- Playground equipment for small children
- A multiple-purpose, surfaced play area
- An athletic area (non-lighted) for games such as baseball, football and soccer, and a surfaced area for such sports as volleyball, basketball and similar activities.

Other desirable elements for neighborhood parks include:

- Pavilions with tables and grills for picnics
- Restrooms
- Drinking fountains
- Tennis courts
- A passive area with landscaping, trees and natural elements.

Neighborhood parks are designed to serve a small population area. An appropriate standard in relation to size and population for this type of park is 1.5 to 2.5 acres per 1,000 persons. These parks normally serve a population base of 1,000 to 2,500 persons, and they generally range in size from five to 10 acres. Lobo Lake Park is considered a Neighborhood Park and features fishing, picnic facilities, a playground and a mountain with a moat.



Lobo Lake Park

**Lobo Lake Park is considered a
Neighborhood Park**

Community Park

A community park is larger than a neighborhood park, and is oriented toward providing active recreational facilities for all ages. Community parks serve several neighborhood areas, and therefore, they should be conveniently accessible by automobile and should include provisions for off-street parking. Activities provided in these parks generally include:

- Game and practice fields for baseball, football, soccer and softball
- A community building/ recreation center
- Tennis courts
- A surfaced multiple-purpose play area
- Playground structures
- A passive area for picnicking
- Other special facilities like walking/jogging trails

Often community parks are constructed adjacent to, or as a part of, a junior high or high school; this is considered desirable. Community parks are designed to serve a medium population area. An appropriate size standard for these parks in relation to size and population is 3 acres per 1,000 persons, and they generally range in size from 40 acres to 100 acres. Breshear Lake Park, adjacent to South Plains College, is considered a community park.



Breshear Lake Park

Breshear Lake Park is considered a Community Park



City Park

City Park is considered a Large/Regional Park

Large/Regional Parks

Areas that are 100 or more acres in size, which provide both passive and active recreational facilities, are considered to be large/regional (or city-wide) parks. These parks contain facilities that allow for large public gatherings, recreational/sporting opportunities, playgrounds and passive relaxation in open space areas. City Park is a large/regional park of over 116 acres and provides all of the above mentioned amenities. It is a popular destination for family get-togethers and reunions and is one of the well-used parks in the City.



Playground Equipment

Playground equipment has been successful for various park types

Special Parks

Golf courses, linear parks/greenbelts, trails, country clubs, school parks, botanical gardens and special athletic and community centers, are considered to be special types of recreational facilities. Standards for this type of facility are variable and dependent upon the extent of services provided by the special facility. The Levelland Country Club and its existing nine hole golf course is considered a special park as well as the R.V. Park in the northeastern portion of the City. Many golfers within the community are members.



Levelland Country Club
The country club and its golf course are considered a Special Park

Parkways & Ornamental Areas

Plazas, street medians, scenic drives and grounds of public buildings and similar facilities are important aspects of the overall park system and should receive careful attention for their development and maintenance. They are also often a pleasant passive place that may be provided as part of a trail system. The park area in which the Hockley County courthouse is situated in downtown is an excellent example and provides a resting and peaceful environment for downtown office workers and shopkeepers.



Gazebo and Park Area, Court House
The gazebo and park area around the Hockley County Courthouse are an example of an ornamental park setting in the City

8.3 Park Standards

This plan adopts Table 8.1 below, which was developed from standards put forth by the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA), and recommends that Levelland meet these requirements in conjunction with its growth to a projected population of 19,000 by the year 2023.

Table 8.1 Park Facility Standards Analysis, Levelland*

ACTIVITY	NRPA Standards	Standard Met	Recommendation for Future Projected Population of 19,000
Basketball	1/5,000	Yes	sufficient
Tennis Courts	1/2,000	Yes	10
Baseball	1/20,000	Yes	sufficient
Baseball-Lighted	1/5,000	Yes	sufficient
Football	1/20,000	Yes	sufficient
Soccer	1/10,000	Yes	sufficient
Playgrounds	NS	N/A	sufficient
Picnic Tables	1/300	No	63
Swimming Pools	1/20,000	N/A	sufficient
Volleyball	NS	N/A	N/A
Trails	NS	N/A	maximized

*1997 Parks Plan and Standards of the NRPA

8.4 Recommendations and Financing

Recommendations are only valuable if they are feasible to the party (the City) responsible for carrying out the recommendations. In the case of the Parks Plan, as with many ventures and projects, recommendations and their feasibility are inextricably linked to financing. The ability of the City to access existing public funds and gain new funding is the single largest determinant to what the parks system may become. It is the responsibility of the Parks Plan to make recommendations regarding improvements and expansions based on what might reasonably be expected in terms of funding.

Financing

Potential funding sources remain the same and include state and federal funds, local government funds, private foundations, and private donations. It is recommended that at least one City official constantly monitor all funding sources for changes in policy, funding levels, etc. and have the necessary skills and experience to respond appropriately to possible funding sources. **The ability to win available funds from**

outside local government funds will be the key determinant to meeting priorities. Existing

“The ability of the City to access existing public funds and gain new funding is the single largest determinant to what the parks system may become.”

taxes do not produce the revenue required to address these priorities. No park improvements were included to be funded in the 2001 CIP and as such should not be anticipated as a possible funding source in the near future.

Recommendations

More recently, in the 2001 Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and in concerns stated by the 2003 Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee, other recommendations have been made. Principally that the northeastern portion of town will also be in demand of a neighborhood park (2001 CIP) and that, where possible, trails should be constructed, through impact fees and dedications by developers, for new residential development to provide trail access from residences to schools and existing and future parks (see Section 3. Goals and Objectives).

It is the recommendation of this plan that the above described recommendations be accommodated by developers and donations (ex. land) from private citizens. Trails are best constructed of concrete, some natural surfaces are also appropriate, at a minimum of 5' width and to be used by pedestrians. Parks may be created and improved by requiring a certain percentage of land be dedicated to parks and that a percentage of development costs be dedicated to the physical improvement of that park. Parks and trails should be maintained by a Home Owners Association (HOA) when appropriate.

The City should be creative in determining and accessing funding. It should engage as many partners as possible, including developers, for the maintenance and expansion of the parks system.

Developers, where they see fit, should be allowed to participate in a development type known as cluster development. Cluster development maintains the exact same density level of residential units for a given parcel but allows for smaller residential lots to be developed. By doing so, land ordinarily taken up by standard lot sizes may be dedicated for parkland and provide a valuable resource to nearby residents and the community as a whole. This will require a change in the zoning ordinance under land use districts.

The City's relationship with the South Plains College and Levelland Independent School District should be encouraged as a positive resource for improving the quality of life in general as well as the parks system through joint ventures to address needs and concerns shared by all parties.

Quality parks, beyond recreational needs, have continuously proven to raise neighboring property values. Market research studies have shown that a property's proximity to a park, open space or trail is in direct proportion to its value. Quality parks, by beautifying the City and providing recreational activities, are an economic boon to the City. As such, the City should

ensure that a high standard of quality is in place for all existing parks prior to creating additional parklands. Parks with higher residential density (i.e. higher potential users) and/or already in high demand should be a priority for improvements as well as those located toward the inner part of the City to further strengthen the City's "core". In short, quality, not quantity of parklands, should be the guiding determinant of park improvements.

Open Space should not be a priority for dedication or park funds given Levelland's open style of development, arid conditions and the expense associated with maintaining the appearance of these lands. City Park is an existing asset of substantial quality open space.

An on-street bike lane connecting Breshear Lake Park, Lobo Lake Park and City Park was agreed upon by the Steering Committee as an asset to the parks system, while creating an alternative mode of travel through the City (refer to Plate 8.1 Parks Plan for a graphic depiction of a conceptual route). A realistic and valuable route will only be discovered through meetings with bikers, affected neighborhoods, public officials and the general public. The bike lanes will consist of painted stripes and symbols only, 5' in width², located on both sides of the street, and positioned between traffic and on-street parking. Auto travel lanes parallel to bike lanes should be a minimum 10'. Parallel on-street parking lanes should be a minimum 7'.³ Bikers will be required to follow most normal traffic laws associated with auto travel. The bike lane should be continuous throughout its proposed and ultimate route.



Bike Lane, example

Bike lane positioned between traffic and on-street parked cars

Source: <http://www.worldisround.com>

In general, this plan endorses the recommendations and priorities described in the 1997 Parks Plan and updated in 1999. Given recent and on-going developments in the park system, and the input received from the CIP and Comprehensive Planning Advisory Committees, the current priorities are:

High Priority

- More playgrounds
- A new park to serve the North Park area

Priorities for the parks system is based on research done in years past and recent public input.

² Source: <http://www.bicyclinginfo.org/de/onstreet.htm>. Retrieved November 4, 2003.

³ Ibid.

Moderate Priority

- More Trails
- More Picnic Facilities

Priority

- Enlarge Breshear Lake Park
- Pool on East Side of Town
- Public Gymnasium
- Golf Course
- Bike Lanes

Other Issues/Ongoing Discussion

- Tennis Courts
- Security Lighting to Reduce Vandalism
- Landscape City Pool
- Cover for City Pool
- Excavate Playa at L. G. Griffin Park
- Reduce Civic Center Rates
- Speed Control in City Park
- Rename City Park
- Programs for Adults

As these priorities are accomplished, the City should seek to develop new parks to ensure that it addresses future population growth and maintains standards set by NRPA (refer to Table 8.1 for recommendations on numbers and types of parks required). With population growth comes new residential development. It is recommended that the City utilize opportunities associated with requiring new development to provide parks for its residents. Doing so allows the City to focus financing on improvements to the existing system. Where growth occurs will determine where new facilities and parks should be located. Similar to the *Pubic Facilities Plan*, the abundance of adequate candidate sites for new park facilities is substantial and therefore does not warrant a process of researching candidate sites and acquiring for future growth.