

Recreation Element





Recreation Element

“Park improvement is among the most important of the undertakings now before the City. It should have the cordial cooperation of all.”

San Diego Union editorial on the City Park System, July 6, 1910

Purpose

To preserve, protect, acquire, develop, operate, maintain, and enhance public recreation opportunities and facilities throughout the City for all users.

Introduction

The City of San Diego has over 38,930 acres of park and open space lands that offer a diverse range of recreational opportunities. The City’s parks, open space, trails, and recreation facilities annually serve millions of residents and visitors and play an important role in the physical, mental, social, and environmental health of the City and its residents. Parks can improve the quality of life by strengthening the body and assisting in maintaining physical well-being. Mental and social



Mission Trails Regional Park

benefits include visual relief from urban development, passive recreational opportunities that refresh the frame of mind and provide opportunities for social interaction, and healthy activities for all. Park and open space lands benefit the environment by providing habitat for plants and animals, and space for urban runoff to percolate into the soil, while also serving to decrease the effects of urban heat islands. In addition, the City park system supports San Diego’s tourism industry, and enhances the City’s ability to attract and retain businesses.

San Diego’s environment, its coastal location, temperate climate, and diverse topography, contribute to creating the City’s first-class recreation and open space system for San Diego’s residents and visitors. The goals and policies of the Recreation Element have been



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO
General Plan

Recreation Element

The General Plan Open Space and Parks Map depicts generalized open space and park land uses in the City of San Diego. The information is a composite of the open space and park uses that are mapped in adopted land use plans. It is intended as a representation of the distribution of open space and park lands throughout the City. It is not a replacement or substitution for community or other adopted land use plans. Please refer to the relevant community or other adopted land use plan documents for more detail regarding open space and park uses.

Revised April 10, 2021

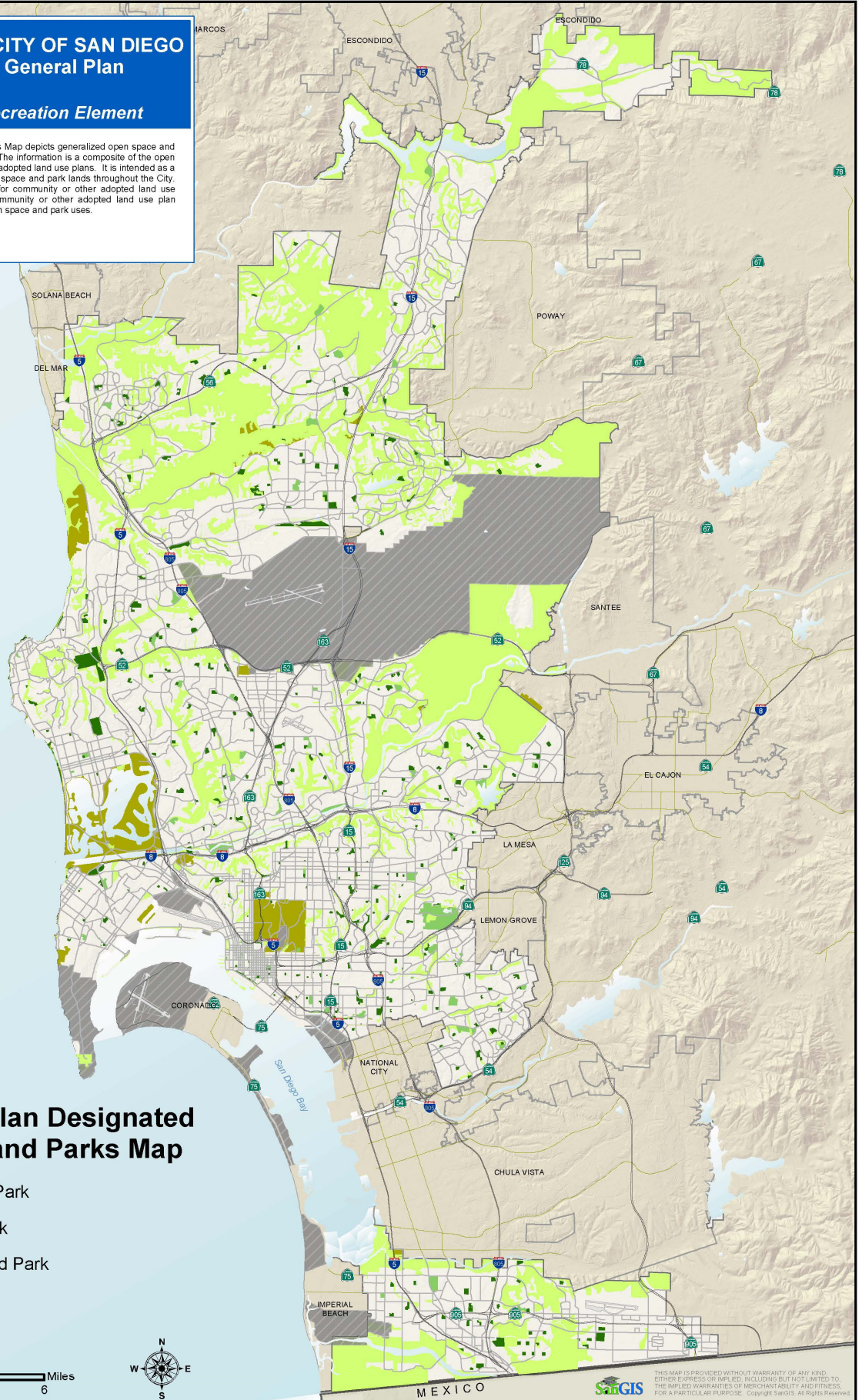


Figure RE-1

**Community Plan Designated
Open Space and Parks Map**

- Neighborhood Park
- Community Park
- Resource Based Park
- Open Space
- Military Use

0 1 2 4 6 Miles



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developed to take advantage of the City's natural environment and resources, to build upon existing recreation facilities and services, to help achieve an equitable balance of recreational resources, and to adapt to future recreation needs.

The City's Parks and Open Space System

The City of San Diego provides three use categories of parks and recreation for residents and visitors: population-based, resource-based, and open space. These three categories of recreation, including recreational value land, facilities, and programming, constitute the City of San Diego's municipal park and recreation system.



Hilltop Community Park, Rancho Peñasquitos

- Population-based parks (commonly known as Neighborhood and Community parks), facilities and services are located in close proximity to residential development and are intended to serve the daily needs of the neighborhood and community. When possible, they adjoin schools in order to share facilities, and ideally are within walking distance of the residences within their service area. As the category's name implies, these parks are developed based on population changes.
- Resource-based parks are located at, or centered on, notable natural or man-made features (beaches, canyons, habitat systems, lakes, historic sites, and cultural facilities) and are intended to serve the citywide population, as well as visitors.
- Open space lands are City-owned lands located throughout the City, consisting of canyons, mesas, and other natural landforms. This open space is intended to preserve and protect native plants and animals, while providing public access and enjoyment by the use of hiking, biking, and equestrian trails.

Parks and open spaces that have been designated in community plans are shown on Figure RE-1, Community Plan Designated Open Space and Parks Map.

Park and Recreation Challenges

It has become increasingly challenging to meet the public's park and recreational needs as resident and visitor populations grow, land values increase, and the availability of vacant land decreases. The City faces:



Recreation Element

- Increased demand on existing/remaining useable park and recreation resources/facilities, especially in older, urbanized communities;
- Increased pressure to develop open space lands and resource-based parks for population-based recreational purposes;
- Inequitable distribution of, and access to, parks citywide, especially in older, developed communities; and
- The need to balance competing land uses, and to recognize the unique differences among communities, in order to achieve livable neighborhoods and communities.

The Recreation Element contains policies to address these challenges. The element recommends that the City pursue long-term joint use agreements with schools, other public agencies, or private entities; ensure that adequate park fees are collected to provide for the park needs generated by new development; and allow for alternative means of providing timely and equitable park and recreation facilities. The City's comprehensive Parks Master Plan sets priorities for protection and enhancement of existing park and recreation assets and identifies policies and implementation actions to guide provision of parks and recreational opportunities to meet present and future City needs.

The Recreation Element is not an isolated component of the General Plan. It is interconnected in varying degrees to other elements of the General Plan. In particular, the Conservation Element and the Mobility Element provides additional policies for protecting and preserving natural resources and open space, many of which contribute to the City's recreation and open space system identifying sidewalks, bike paths, pedestrian paths, and multi-purpose trails to form a continuous region-wide network that links open space and recreation to communities throughout the City. Additionally, the Public Facilities Element provides the City's financing strategy for providing many public services, including park and recreational opportunities. Overall, the City of Villages strategy reinforces the importance of recreation as an essential quality of life factor that needs to be integrated into communities.



A. Park and Recreation Guidelines

Goals

- ◆ A sustainable park and recreation system that meets the needs of all residents and visitors.
- ◆ Provision of parks that keep pace with population growth through timely acquisition and development, and facility upgrades.
- ◆ An increase in the amount and quality of recreation facilities and infrastructure through the promotion of alternative methods where development of typical facilities and infrastructure may be limited by land constraints.
- ◆ An equitable citywide distribution of and access to parks and recreation facilities.

Discussion

As the City has grown, so have the quantity, quality, and distribution of recreation opportunities. New parks and open space have been acquired and facilities and services have been expanded in response to City needs.

Recreation activities in the form of cultural, athletic, sport, social, and craft programs have been developed to serve a wide variety of the population throughout the City at parks, recreation centers, athletic fields, and public schools.

A variation exists between communities with respect to total recreational facilities and parks provided. Of most concern is the lack of quality usable neighborhood and community facilities in portions of older urbanized neighborhoods. Some reasons for this include:

- The older urbanized communities were developed without specified park development guidelines or park fees;
- In the past, large resource-based parks such as Mission Bay Park and Balboa Park, which serve both residents and visitors, were not included when considering community population park needs Continued development of new housing further adds to the need for new population-based parks;
- There is a limited amount of undeveloped land readily available for development of new parks, making it necessary to acquire previously-developed land, or invest in upgrading existing parks; and



*Youth baseball in Jerabek
Neighborhood Park Scripps Ranch*



Recreation Element

- There is often a lack of funding strategies and resources to enable planned and opportunistic land acquisitions and other park and recreation investments.

Retrofitting older neighborhoods to add new parks must be achieved with solutions that balance the often competing needs of parks, housing and other land uses. The Public Facilities, Services and Safety Element provides additional goals and policies related to funding of parks and recreation facilities. Additionally, downtown San Diego has a small block pattern and limited vacant land, and as the regional core is targeted for extensive, high-intensity vertical development, therefore necessitating creative and flexible methods for downtown to fulfill citywide goals, policies and standards.

In addition to land constraints, the City has been continually challenged with economic constraints in regard to park development, maintenance and operations. Therefore, it is essential that new parks and recreation facilities, and improvements to existing parks and facilities be designed and constructed to endure the intended use with

minimal general fund funding for maintenance or upgrades during the expected useful life of the facility. When planning special activity parks and smaller, more intensive parks which may require a higher level of maintenance, additional funding sources for maintenance will need to be identified. Sustainable development features including application of water and energy conservation measures, green building technology, low-maintenance plantings, and design which is sensitive to local environmental conditions can help reduce long-term costs (see also Conservation Element, Section A).

There are many recreation facilities within the City that, while not under the control of the City of San Diego, provide a wide variety of recreation opportunities for the public that assist in meeting their recreation needs. These facilities come in many forms, from government-owned and operated parks to commercial endeavors, such as fitness clubs. Each serves to increase recreation opportunities, if only for a specified time. Of significant benefit to the public are those facilities that are owned, operated, and maintained by other governmental agencies and not-for-profit entities. These facilities tend to represent long-term investments in recreation and are designed to be accessible to the widest range of the public. Some examples of these are the Cabrillo National Monument, Port of San Diego

Mission Bay Park

Mission Bay Park was developed from the 1940s through the 1960s using a tidal marsh that Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo named "False Bay" in 1542. In 1944, a Chamber of Commerce committee recommended development of Mission Bay into a tourist and recreation center to help diversify the City's economy. In the late 1940s, dredging and filling operations began converting the marsh into the jewel that is today, Mission Bay Park. Twenty-five million cubic yards of sand and silt were dredged to create the landforms of the park, which now is almost entirely man-made.

Mission Bay Park comprises 27 miles of shoreline. Swimmers, boating enthusiasts, and sun lovers are drawn to Mission Bay's beaches and water activities. The park offers a wide variety of recreation facilities and activities including boat docks and launching facilities, sailboat and motor rentals, 14 miles of biking and walking paths, basketball courts, and play areas for children. It's one of San Diego's most visited parks.



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO
General Plan

Recreation Element

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Pacific Ocean

Figure RE-2
Planning Areas by
Community Park
Planning Regions

- Central Region
- Coastal Region
- Eastern Region
- North Central Region
- Northern Region
- Southern Region
- Military Use



- Central Region**
 - 1 Balboa Park
 - 2 Barrio Logan
 - 10 Downtown
 - 13 Encanto Neighborhoods
 - 15 Greater Golden Hill
 - 16 North Park
 - 46 Skyline-Paradise Hills
 - 48 Southeastern San Diego
 - 54 Uptown
 - Coastal Region**
 - 19 La Jolla
 - 22 Midway-Pacific Highway
 - 25 Mission Bay Park
 - 26 Mission Beach
 - 30 Ocean Beach
 - 32 Old San Diego
 - 35 Pacific Beach
 - 37 Peninsula
 - Eastern Region**
 - 8 College Area
 - 11 East Elliott
 - 6 City Heights*
 - 12 Eastern Area*
 - 18 Kensington-Talmadge*
 - 29 Normal Heights*
 - 28 Navajo
 - 49 Tierrasanta
 - North Central Region**
 - 7 Clairemont Mesa
 - 17 Kearny Mesa
 - 20 Linda Vista
 - 27 Mission Valley
 - 45 Serra Mesa
 - 53 University
 - Northern Region**
 - 3 Black Mountain Ranch
 - 4 Carmel Mountain Ranch
 - 5 Carmel Valley
 - 9 Del Mar Mesa
 - 14 Fairbanks Country Club
 - 30 North City Subarea 2
 - 21 Los Penasquitos Canyon Preserve
 - 23 Mira Mesa
 - 24 Miramar Ranch North
 - 36 Pacific Highlands Ranch
 - 38 Rancho Bernardo
 - 39 Rancho Encantada
 - 40 Rancho Penasquitos
 - 41 Sabre Springs
 - 42 San Pasqual
 - 44 Scripps Miramar Ranch
 - 51 Torrey Highlands
 - 47 Torrey Hills
 - 52 Torrey Pines
 - 55 Via De La Valle
 - Southern Region**
 - 33 Otay Mesa
 - 34 Otay Mesa-Nestor
 - 43 San Ysidro
 - 50 Tijuana River Valley
- * Mid-City Community Plan



Recreation Element

parcs, County of San Diego parks, Torrey Pines State Park, the Salvation Army Corps Ray and Joan Kroc Community Center, YMCAs, and Jewish Community Centers.

An ideal balance of recreational opportunities throughout the City is best achieved by considering a number of factors, such as a park's overall value to residents and visitors,, economic feasibility, community needs and desires, topographic conditions, changing demographics, and evolving trends in recreation. A park's overall value, physical facilities, accessibility, service radius, supervision, and leadership should all be included in the total effort to achieve, as much as possible, the same level of service and opportunity or need fulfillment in each community citywide. Overall park value should be determined by looking at a variety of factors such as location, surrounding land uses, and population density, park amenities, access, integration to transit, public art placemaking elements, and recreation amenities. All City parks should be accessible to all residents and visitors Citywide through an interconnected Citywide parks system. A variety of recreational opportunities should be available to everyone.

Neighborhood and community park facilities should take a variety of forms in response to the specific needs and desires of the residents involved. Neighborhood parks should be oriented toward achieving maximum neighborhood involvement in terms of interest, participation, and support. They should be an important element in creating neighborhood identity. Community parks should supplement those activities in the neighborhood parks and provide for a greater variety of facilities and active programmed uses.

Minimum standards and strategies for development of parks and recreation facilities throughout the City are identified in the City's Parks Master Plan. These standards are intended to establish a method to measure the degree to which park and recreation facilities are developed, to ensure a well-planned interconnected Citywide parks system that is most beneficial to the City's residents and visitors, and to ensure the equitable provision of parks throughout the City . Flexibility is a key strategy to ensuring that the City can take advantage of both traditional, as well as unique and innovative parks and recreational opportunities.

Flexibility in the provision of recreation facilities is crucial to achieving citywide equity. The Parks Master Plan includes guidelines for implementing additional recreation opportunities throughout the City. Implementation of additional recreation strategies that go beyond traditional parks can allow for the equitable provision of park and recreational facilities, with built-in safeguards designed to protect the public interest.



Mission Bay



Policies

Park Planning

- RE-A.1. Implement the City's Parks Master Plan with an informed and equitable public process.
- RE-A.2. Refine citywide park and recreation land use policies through community plan updates or other comprehensive planning efforts consistent with the Parks Master Plan to identify potential funding for park and recreation facilities, and to identify potential locations for parks and recreational opportunities that can be easily accessed by walking, biking, or transit and are centrally located, or provide unique recreational opportunities to residents and visitors.
- RE-A.3. Take advantage of recreational opportunities presented by the natural environment, in particular, open spaces and the beaches and shorelines.
- RE-A.4. Consider existing, long-term recreation facilities provided by not-for-profit organizations when establishing priorities for new facilities.
- RE-A.5. Improve distribution of the most specialized recreation facilities, such as water play areas, swimming pools, off-leash dog areas, and skate parks, and strive to increase bicycle, pedestrian, and transit access to these facilities.
- RE-A.6. In addition to upgrading existing parks, continue to pursue opportunities to develop new parks and acquire new parkland.
 - a. Identify underutilized City lands and public right-of-way's with potential for use as mini-parks, pocket parks, urban plazas, and community gardens.
 - b. Encourage community participation in development and maintenance of City-owned mini-parks, pocket parks, urban plazas, and community gardens.
 - c. Pursue acquisition of urban lands, as it becomes available, that could be developed as mini-parks, pocket parks or urban plazas.
- RE-A.7. Establish a policy for park design and development that encourages the use of sustainable methods and techniques to address water and energy conservation, green buildings, low maintenance plantings and local environmental conditions, such as soil and climate (see also Conservation Element, Section A).

Park Standards

- RE-A.8. Fully implement and achieve the park standards identified in the Parks Master Plan, including land acquisition.



Recreation Element

- RE-A.9. Identify opportunities to increase recreational value and population-based parks within the community consistent with the Parks Master Plan by planning for upgrades and new investments within existing parks. Allow for flexibility and innovation to provide parks and recreational opportunities.
- Continue the ongoing practice of developing joint use facilities utilizing a public input process.
 - Increase community and Citywide access to population-based parks, resource-based parks and open spaces, consistent with the Parks Master Plan.
 - Identify underutilized existing parks to be upgraded to increase recreational value to the City's parks system.
- RE-A.10. Encourage private development to include recreation facilities, such as children's play areas, rooftop parks and courts, useable public plazas, and mini-parks. (see also Urban Design Policies, UD-B.8 and UD-C.5)
- Consider private recreation facilities when evaluating development park needs when it is clearly identified that the facilities and programs provide a public benefit and are bound by easements and agreements that remain in effect in perpetuity according to adopted policies (see also RE-C.6.).

Equity

- RE-A.11. Develop a diverse range of recreation programs that are sensitive to and consider community needs, interests, and financial resources.
- RE-A.13. Develop a diverse range of recreation programs that are sensitive to and consider community needs, interests, and financial resources.
- RE-A.14. Ensure that appropriate quality and quantity of parks, recreation facilities and infrastructure is provided citywide.
- RE-A.15. Prioritize funding for acquisition and development of park and recreation facilities in communities of concern.
- RE-A.16. Prioritize the development of parks and recreation facilities for local youth activities in communities of concern.

Implementation

- RE-A.17. Identify potential funding opportunities to implement and achieve the park standards identified in the Parks Master Plan.



- RE-A.18. Prepare an ordinance for City Council consideration that authorizes implementation of the state Subdivision Map Act/Quimby Act and provides a methodology for acquiring land and/or appropriate park fees from new subdivisions for population-based parks and recreation facilities.
- RE-A.19. Ensure that all development impact fees collected for the acquisition and development of population-based parks and recreation facilities are used for appropriate purposes in a timely and equitable manner.
- RE-A.20. Pursue joint use agreements for recreational facilities on other public agency-owned land to help implement the standards identified in the Parks Master Plan.
- RE-A.21. Engage local Kumeyaay tribal members with traditional knowledge of ethnobotany and ethnoecology to share information regarding educational opportunities when planning parks and recreation areas. Utilizing such knowledge allows for sensitive interpretation of the complex history and biodiversity of San Diego.



B. Recreational Opportunities

Goals

- ◆ A City with park and recreation facilities and services that are designed to accommodate the needs of a growing and diverse population and respects the City's natural landforms.
- ◆ A regional and citywide parks/open space system, including the bays, beaches, rivers, and other attractions, that gives our region identity, attracts tourism, and enriches the quality of life for residents and visitors.
- ◆ A City with a diverse range of active and passive recreational opportunities that meet the needs of and reinforces the City's natural beauty and resources.

Discussion

San Diego's mild climate, diverse topography, and unique location that spans from the mountains to the coast, physically define the City and afford it exceptional recreational opportunities. San Diego is fortunate to have a temperate climate that makes comfortable year-round outdoor recreation possible. Its hillsides, canyons, mesas, and floodplains help shape the City's urban form and provide numerous and varied recreational opportunities. The City's beaches, bays, and estuaries provide active and passive recreational opportunities. San Diego is also defined by its diverse neighborhoods and communities. These neighborhoods and communities are reflective of the wide array of cultures, income levels, ethnicities, physical abilities, and household types that represent the City and influence its recreation choices.

Recreation and leisure-time activities are defined by the user, and include active and passive pursuits. While some residents and visitors may participate in active recreation such as organized or programmed sports, others may choose passive activities such as reading under a shade tree, strolling through a garden, or observing nature. Individual recreation choices are based on a number of factors including location, age, family composition, schedule, physical ability, and culture.

The City's park and recreation system offers a broad range of opportunities for recreation and leisurely pursuits. It is a network of park lands, open space, recreation facilities, programs, and staff services designed to meet the specialized needs of individual neighborhoods and communities while respecting the natural resources and landforms. The City provides sports fields, swimming pools, tennis courts, parks, beaches, picnic areas, skate parks, dog off-leash parks, hiking/biking and equestrian trails, and areas of scenic beauty for public use, as well as a variety of programs for youth, adults, and seniors.



For purposes of this document, General Plan-designated open space and parks are those areas of the City that are identified in adopted land use plans as open space or parks. As such, these areas include local and resource-based parks, open space with natural or cultural value (including Multiple Habitat Planning Area [MHPA] lands), and areas identified in land use plans that may not contain natural or cultural characteristics, but instead function to provide a land use buffer, visual relief, or similar purpose (see Figure RE-1, Community Plan Designated Open Space and Parks Map, and also Conservation Element, Figure CE-2, Multi-Habitat Planning Area).



Skate Park



Crystal Pier, Pacific Beach

Policies

- RE-B.1. Provide access to a diversity of recreation facilities and programs that meet the City's demographically changing needs while ensuring no net-loss of overall park acreage or recreational value.
- RE-B.2. Sustain partnerships with communities in the planning, site selection, design, and construction of park and recreation facilities to ensure resident, neighborhood and area needs are satisfied.
- RE-B.3. Include recreation needs in community plans, consistent with the Parks Master Plan, to ensure that facilities and programs reflect community preferences, including the growing demand for senior activities.
- RE-B.4. In planning, with respect to existing parks, give consideration to preserving the existing uses, while simultaneously identify opportunities to upgrade and improve the parks.



C. Preservation

Goals

- ◆ Preserve, protect and enhance the integrity and quality of existing parks, open space, and recreation programs citywide.
- ◆ Preserve, protect and enrich natural, cultural, and historic resources that serve as recreation facilities.

Discussion

San Diegans place a high value on the availability of park and recreation opportunities, and increasingly recognize their importance as a requisite companion to urban living as population densities increase. As San Diego continues to grow, so will the demand for parks and recreation opportunities. Since undeveloped land in the City is diminishing, it is increasingly difficult to provide new parks, thus putting increased pressure on existing parks. This will be especially evident in the older, well-established urban communities. Thus, existing parks must be protected from degradation caused by overuse. Preservation and enhancement of existing population-based parks, resource-based parks, recreation programs, and open space (including canyons) is essential and will require careful balancing of community and park infrastructure needs.

Key to the preservation and enhancement of open space and parkland is the use of the City's resource-based parks which are home to many of the City's cultural and natural resources. Cultural resources are man-made physical features associated with human activity. In addition to their historic value, cultural resources often function as recreation facilities. The Old Mission Dam (Padre Dam) in Mission Trails Regional Park, and the Presidio and Fort Stockton in Presidio Park are examples of cultural resources that provide recreational value. Natural resources are the naturally occurring environmental attributes of the region. They include the beaches, canyons, mesas, rivers, floodplains, and associated plants and animals. These resources, like cultural resources, provide varying opportunities for recreation. Cultural and natural



California Tower, Balboa Park



resources should be protected and preserved as reminders of man's historic presence, the regions' natural history, and to provide maximum educational, recreational, and aesthetic benefit for the citizens of, and visitors to San Diego.

Policies

- RE-C.1. Protect existing parklands and open space from unauthorized encroachment by adjacent development through appropriate enforcement measures.
- RE-C.2. Protect, manage and enhance parks and open space lands through appropriate means which include sensitive planning, park and open space dedications, and physical protective devices.
- RE-C.3. Identify and secure funding sources necessary for protecting, preserving, and maintaining parks and open space.
- RE-C.4. Preserve all beaches for public-only purposes, including the protection of sensitive habitat and species.
- RE-C.5. Design parks to preserve, enhance, and incorporate items of natural, cultural, Native American, or historic importance.
- RE-C.6. Ensure temporary and permanent commercial uses within parks are park-serving, complementary to existing or proposed recreational uses, and contribute to the safety and enjoyability of the park, consistent with the Parks Master Plan.
- RE-C.7. Protect beaches and canyons from uncontrolled urban runoff.
- RE-C.8. Develop programs to educate the public on the variety, importance, and

History of Balboa Park

On May 26, 1868, when San Diego consisted of only 2,301 residents and 915 houses, a 1,400-acre tract of nine city pueblo lots was set aside as "City Park." Twenty-four years later, in 1892, Kate O. Sessions asked City officials to lease 30 acres of "City Park" for a nursery, and in return, she would plant 100 trees per year throughout the park. In 1902, the Park Improvement Committee employed landscape architect Samuel Parsons, to develop a comprehensive plan for the park. By 1910 the parkland began to look much as it does today. In that same year a contest was held to rename the park. Balboa, in honor of Spanish explorer Vasco Nuñez de Balboa, the first European to see the Pacific Ocean, was selected, in part, because the park also offered wide views of the Pacific Ocean.

Balboa Park owes much of its development to two world fairs, the Panama-California Exposition of 1915-16, and the California Pacific International Exposition of 1935-36. The design of the 1915 Panama-California Exposition reflected Spanish Colonial Architecture. The Cabrillo Bridge, most of the Cultural Center buildings along El Prado, and the Spreckels Organ Pavilion were built for the Exposition, under the supervision of architect, Bertrum Goodhue. The development of the Southern Palisades grew out of the California Pacific International Exposition and was designed to represent a complete history of the Southwest, from prehistoric times to the modern era, under the direction of Richard Requa, Director of Architecture and Landscaping. Many of the buildings were designed to be reminders of Indian Pueblo or Mayan building design.

Today, Balboa Park is comprised of more than 1,100 gross acres and 820 useable acres. It



Recreation Element

recreational uses of the City's natural and cultural resources that are located in City parks and open space lands.

- RE-C.9. Determine strategies that accommodate both land for residential, commercial, and industrial use with the needs for parkland and open space uses.
- RE-C.10. Develop strategies that adapt public rights-of-way that support recreation, walkability, sociability, bikeability, and health while reducing vehicular congestion and emissions



D. Accessibility

Goals

- ◆ A park and recreation system that provides an equitable distribution of park and recreation facilities that are designed to accommodate the needs of a diverse population, age ability, or place of residence.
- ◆ Park and recreation facilities that are sited to optimize access by foot, bicycle, public transit, automobile, and alternative modes of travel.
- ◆ Provision of an inter-connected park and open space system that is integrated into and accessible to the community.
- ◆ Recreational facilities that are available for programmed and non-programmed uses.

Discussion

Park and recreation facilities enhance the quality of life for all San Diegans. These facilities should be integrated into the urban fabric so they become a convenient and easily accessible part of the daily life of San Diegans. San Diego's recreation system is comprised of a large number of facility types and programs dispersed throughout the City. However, due to City development patterns through the years, parks and recreation facilities are not equitably distributed citywide.



Balboa Park

Recreation access has three main components: linkage, opportunity, and availability. Regarding recreation linkages, ideally, parks should be located within a 10-minute walk, 20-minute bike ride, or 30-minute transit ride of residential neighborhoods and employment centers. However, given the wide variety of recreation facility types, their use characteristics, and associated costs, it is not always feasible to locate every type of recreation facility in every community. Therefore, regional recreation facilities should be placed equitably throughout the City, particularly in areas with the most need.



Recreation Element

Recreation opportunity addresses the need for facilities to be accessible to the broadest population possible. This means facilities should be optimally located and designed to address people with special needs. They should be located along transit routes that provide access for the disabled, elderly, teens, and the economically disadvantaged. They should be designed as open facilities that can be easily navigated by seniors and persons with disabilities. Outdoor recreational opportunities should also be available to the diverse population within the City's open space and resource-based parks. This can be accomplished through development of accessible overlooks and trails, where feasible, and interpretive and directional signs (see also RE-F.7). The Mobility and Conservation Elements provide additional recommendations regarding access (see also Mobility Element, Policies ME-A.6.b and CE-B.5).

Many people enjoy the use of trails for the outdoor experience, opportunity for exercise, and linkages they offer. When improving existing trails or designing new ones, it is important to provide for the protection of natural and cultural resources, as well as to address water management, user safety, and maintenance needs. The development of a proposed city-wide Trails Master Plan will assist in planning for and the adoption of a city-wide trails system, within and connecting the City's and region's open space areas, parks and recreation amenities. Until the adoption of a Trails Master Plan, the City's trail standards can be found as an appendix to the Consultant's Guide to Park Design and Development, which provides guidelines for new trail construction and for improvements to existing trails. Basic trail definitions are included in the Glossary.

Recreation availability addresses the need for facilities to be open for use by the general public. Many recreation facilities set aside time for exclusive use by programmed activities, such as sport leagues, clubs, or other private groups. These programmed activities fulfill recreational needs of the community. However, a balance between programmed and non-programmed use of recreation facilities must be achieved to make facilities available to the greatest number and variety of users.

Policies

- RE-D.1. Provide new and upgraded park and recreation facilities that employ universal design principles that make them accessible to San Diegans regardless of age or physical ability, giving priority to economically disadvantaged communities.
- RE-D.2. Provide barrier-free trails and outdoor experiences and opportunities for persons with disabilities where feasible.
- RE-D.3. Provide recreation programs and services specifically designed to meet the needs of children, the increasing elderly population, persons with disabilities and the underserved teenage population.



- RE-D.4. Equitably distribute regional special activity recreation facilities that are not feasibly located in most community parks based on broader service areas.
- RE-D.5. Work with regional agencies to improve public transit to park and recreation facilities.
- RE-D.6. Provide safe and convenient bicycle, pedestrian, and micromobility linkages to, and within, park and recreation facilities and open space areas.
- Provide pedestrian and bicycle paths between recreation facilities and residential development.
 - Designate pedestrian and bicycle corridors, and equestrian corridors where appropriate, that link residential neighborhoods with park and recreation facilities, trails, and open spaces and active commercial areas.
 - Improve public access through development of, and improvements to, multi-use trails within urban canyons and other open space areas.
 - Coordinate efforts with the City's Pedestrian Master Plan, the Parks Master Plan, Trails Master Plan, and the County's trail system to provide safe and convenient linkages between areas (see also Mobility Element, Section A).
 - Coordinate with the county, state, and federal governments to ensure planning for and connectivity to trail systems outside of the City such as the Trans-County Trail Plan, San Diego River trails, Sweetwater River trails, Otay Valley trails, the California Coastal Trail, the Pacific Crest Trail and the California Riding and Hiking Trail.
 - Identify key trails and access points as a part of community plan updates, discretionary permit reviews, and other applicable land use and park planning documents.
- RE-D.7. Provide public access to open space for recreational purposes.
- Provide public access into Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) open space for only those recreational purposes deemed compatible with the preservation goals of the MSCP Subarea Plan.
 - Provide public access at locations consistent with the goals and policies of the Conservation Element.
 - Provide new, and preserve and enhance existing public beach access, where appropriate.
- RE-D.8. Balance the scheduling of programmed and non-programmed use of parks and recreation facilities to provide access to a diversity of users.



Recreation Element

- RE-D.9. Maximize natural sunlight and shade opportunities by planting trees in park areas to provide shade relief and a range of recreational experiences throughout the year for all users.
- RE-D.10. Ensure gender equity in the park design and programming.



E. Joint Use and Cooperative Partnerships

Goals

- ◆ Achievement of greater public benefit through shared use of recreational resources.
- ◆ An increase in recreational activities and programs through multi-agency coordination of interagency public lands, facilities and infrastructure uses.
- ◆ Joint use and lease agreements that contribute to the recreational and physical education needs of the community.

Discussion

Creative methods for cost-effective and efficient use of public lands are required if recreation facilities are to be improved, enhanced, and expanded to meet existing and future needs. San Diego's expanding urban development and its desire to acquire, protect and preserve parkland, recreation facilities, and open space have limited the availability of, and placed constraints on, developable lands. One creative means of providing additional lands and facilities for public recreation use is through joint use of public and not-for-profit facilities such as parks, swimming pools, and schools. Joint use facilities can include any land area or physical structure shared by one or more public or not-for-profit entities. An example of a joint use facility is a multi-purpose sports field at a secondary or middle school that is exclusively used for school purposes during school hours, but is available for public use when school is not in session. Joint use serves an increasingly important role in providing recreation space and facilities in the older, more densely populated urban communities.



Youth soccer at school athletic field, San Carlos

San Diego has a well-established history of developing successful joint use recreation facilities. The City of San Diego entered into its first joint use agreement in September 1948 with the San Diego Unified School District. The City is now a party to approximately 100 similar agreements between it and the San Diego Unified, Solana Beach, Del Mar Union, Poway Unified, and San Ysidro School Districts. These agreements have accommodated the



Recreation Element

need for recreational space by designating school sites for community recreational use during non-school hours. The agreements have resulted in shared use of multi-purpose courts, turfied playfields, lighted and unlighted multi-purpose sports fields, children's play areas and parking lots in communities throughout the City. However, more planned joint use of facilities, especially for athletic field use, have not materialized in some of the City's neighborhoods, particularly in communities of concern. Therefore, it will be a City priority to acquire all land to facilitate more joint use agreements with schools in these areas.

In addition to the continued pursuit of joint use opportunities with school districts, there are opportunities for new cooperative partnerships with governmental agencies and other entities with land holdings. Underutilized public facilities, such as surplus land, remnant parcels, structures, rooftops, plazas, and underground facilities can provide recreation and economic opportunities. Undeveloped rights-of-way not only provide opportunities for trails that link parks and recreation facilities, adaptations to the right-of-ways that provide invitations for people to stay, connect, and interact are also vital to livable neighborhoods. Street space, ranging from parking spaces to entire blocks, can serve a variety of functions. In addition to mobility, streets can be programmed as places to play and socialize while continuing to function as paths of travel, including pedestrian and bicycle travel. The right-of-way can be adapted using many combinations of strategies to achieve more diverse use. Unnecessary paper streets could be vacated and acquired for mini-park development. Surplus land and remnant parcels could be developed into population- and resource-based recreation facilities. Underutilized structures could provide space for recreation programs, underground facilities could possibly provide recreation space at ground level, and rooftops could potentially provide additional recreational opportunities. Once identified and developed, such cooperative partnerships could provide needed recreation facilities and services.

The City of San Diego has partnerships with community volunteers and manages an extensive volunteer program. Volunteers are active in almost all City departments, working in offices, recreation centers, and libraries, or at parks and beaches. In 2004, over 35,000 volunteers worked more than 1,100,000 hours assisting in City departments.

Policies

- RE-E.1. Engage in multi-purpose planning and inter-agency coordination to provide a variety of compatible recreational activities within a given location, especially where they cross jurisdictional boundaries.
- RE-E.2. Work with local school districts', colleges, and universities to expand development of on-campus joint use recreation facilities including multi-purpose courts, parking lots, and multi-purpose athletic fields.



- RE-E.3. Support local school districts' efforts to expand elementary and secondary school sites that result in additional joint use opportunities while balancing the competing needs of recreation and housing.
- RE-E.4. Strive for mutually agreeable long-term, joint use agreements with other public agencies to assure recreation for existing residents and future generations.
- RE-E.5. Pursue acquisition or lease of surplus school property for park development.
- RE-E.6. Use underutilized or unnecessary City rights-of-way and utility easements to help meet recreational needs, where appropriate.
- a. Develop and maintain an inventory of underutilized or unnecessary rights-of-way, including underlying ownership.
 - b. Develop criteria to determine potential value of underutilized or unnecessary rights-of-way and utility easements for recreational use, including bike, pedestrian, and equestrian linkages for trail access to parks and open space (and canyons), and as overlooks into open space or beaches.
- RE-E.7. Design public facilities, such as municipal water storage facilities, public parking structures and libraries, to incorporate recreational elements such as children's play areas, rooftop parks, courts and arenas, plazas, mini-parks, and community gardens.
- RE-E.8. Pursue partnerships and agreements with public agencies and not-for-profit entities to provide additional recreational space within the City such as parks, greenbelts, trail connections, parkways, bike paths, community gardens, plazas, and other recreation facilities. Potential partners for recreation land and facilities may include, but are not limited to:
- Metropolitan Transit System
 - San Diego Unified Port District
 - California Department of Transportation
 - U. S. Department of Defense
 - Other governmental agencies and jurisdictions
 - Utility and railroad companies
 - Redevelopment agencies
 - Not-for-profit youth and recreation entities



Recreation Element

- School districts

- RE-E.9. Explore acquisition or utilization of government-owned surplus or remnant parcels for public park use.
- RE-E.10. Secure land for joint use recreational facilities to ensure its public use in perpetuity.
- Acquire land identified for school athletic program use, where the cost is beneficial and suitable for joint use.
 - Develop financing strategies for City acquisition of land for joint use facilities, where feasible.
 - Where acquisition of the joint use land is not feasible, provide other assurances (such as memoranda of understanding or park easements) that joint use materializes.
 - Negotiate and enter into joint use agreements with school districts to help implement population-based park recommendations.
- RE-E.11. Provide credit to subdividers for the joint use of land reserved for school athletic program use when secured in accordance with RE-E.10.
- RE-E.12. Encourage and support multi-level volunteerism to supplement and enhance public recreational programs, through provision of a wide range of programs that help meet community needs.
- RE-E.13. Pursue partnerships with private interests providing publicly accessible parks and urban plazas as part of the development, participating in the financing, programming, maintenance and operations.



F. Open Space Lands and Resource-Based Parks

Goals

- ◆ An open space and resource-based park system that provides for the preservation and management of natural resources, enhancement of outdoor recreation opportunities, and protection of the public health and safety.
- ◆ Preservation of the natural terrain and drainage systems of San Diego's open space lands and resource-based parks.
- ◆ A system of pedestrian, bicycle, and equestrian paths linking communities, neighborhoods, parks, and the open space system.

Discussion

Open space may be defined as land or water areas generally free from development or developed with very low-intensity uses that respect the characteristics of the natural environment. Open space is generally non-urban in character and may have utility for: park and recreation purposes; conservation of land, water, or other natural resources; historic or scenic purposes; or support of the mission of military installations. Open space that may be designated for outdoor recreation includes, but is not limited to: areas of outstanding scenic, historic, and cultural value; areas particularly suited for park and recreation purposes, including access to passive recreation space adjacent to waterfronts, rivers and creeks; urban canyons; specified areas within the City's Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP); and areas that serve as links between major recreation uses and open space, such as utility easements, river corridors, and trails. The Conservation Element, Section B further defines and expands on policies for the



preservation of open space.



Recreation Element

The City of San Diego's definitions for 'open space' and 'park' vary according to the context in which the terms are used. The Parks Master Plan identifies park typologies in which open space and parks are used, defines them in that context, and lists the general attributes for each. For purposes of this document, designated parks and open space lands are those areas of the City that are identified in adopted land use plans and referred to as either general plan parks or general plan open space lands.

Resource-based parks are intended to preserve and make available to all residents and visitors those areas of outstanding scenic, natural, or cultural interest. Examples of resource-based parks are Presidio Park, Mission Bay Park, and Balboa Park. Although resource-based parks are not developed to address the specific needs of any one community, portions of them can, and do, function to fulfill the local neighborhood and community park needs of surrounding residents. River parks are a type of resource-based park, often involving coordination/cooperation between multiple jurisdictions, that are centered around regional water resources, that provide a strategic plan for the balanced protection of open space, wildlife, historic, agricultural, and archaeological resources and provision of recreational opportunities ranging from playing fields and picnic areas to hiking, biking, and horse trails. The City of San Diego, in association with other agencies and jurisdictions, currently has four river parks at various stages in the planning process: San Diego River Park, San Dieguito River Park, Otay Valley Regional Park, and Tijuana River Valley Regional Park.

Mission Trails Regional Park

Mission Trails Regional Park has been called the third jewel in the City of San Diego Park System (Balboa Park and Mission Bay Park are the first and second.) Started in 1974, Mission Trails Regional Park is one of the largest urban parks in the United States. Originally inhabited by the Kumeyaay Indians, it is the site of the Old Mission Dam, built to store water for the Mission San Diego de Alcalá. The park encompasses approximately 8,000 acres of rugged hills, valleys, and open areas which represent a San Diego prior to the landing of Explorer Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo in San Diego Bay in 1542.

Mission Trails Regional Park provides San Diego residents and visitors a way to explore the cultural, historical, and natural outdoor recreational aspects of San Diego. The park is operated and maintained by the City of San Diego in close partnership with the Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation. With more than 40 miles of trails, boating on Lake Murray, camping at Kumeyaay Lake, numerous informative hikes, and a state-of-the-art Visitor & Interpretive Center, Mission Trails Regional Park

Policies

- RE-F.1. Protect and enhance park lands from adjacent incompatible uses and encroachments. (see also Urban Design Element, Policy UD-A.3.)
- RE-F.2. Provide for sensitive development of recreation uses within and adjacent to City-owned open space lands.



- a. Include only those development features and amenities that do not encroach upon or harm the feature or resource that inspires the open space or resource-based park.
 - b. Design and maintain open space lands to preserve or enhance topographic and other natural site characteristics.
 - c. Preserve designated public open space view corridors, such as views to the Pacific Ocean, other bodies of water, and significant topographic features.
 - d. Preserve open space along lakes, rivers, and creek beds for passive public recreation uses that are consistent with MSCP preservation goals.
 - e. Plant only native plant and non-invasive naturalized plant materials adjacent to open space lands.
 - f. Plant only native plant materials in open space lands intended for natural resource protection.
- RE-F.3. Acquire remaining private beaches within the City for public use.
- RE-F.4. Balance passive recreation needs of trail use with environmental preservation.
- RE-F.5. Utilize open space lands for outdoor recreation purposes, when doing so is compatible with cultural, historic preservation and MSCP conservation goals and surrounding land uses, including, but not limited to:
- Locations of outstanding scenic, historic, and cultural value;
 - Corridors that link recreation facilities and open space areas such as utility easements, river and stream corridors, trails, and scenic highway corridors; and
 - Sites particularly suited for park and recreation purposes, such as areas adjacent to and providing access to beaches, lakeshores, rivers, and streams.
- RE-F.6. Encourage the planning and coordination of river parks to provide public recreational opportunities, protect natural resources, and enhance community character.
- RE-F.7. Create or enhance open space multi-use trails to accommodate, where appropriate, pedestrians/hikers, bicyclists, and equestrians.



Recreation Element

- a. Develop, adopt, and maintain updates of a citywide Trails Master Plan to guide the provision of and enhancement of open space multi-purpose trails.
- b. Enhance public access to public open space by clearly identifying trailheads and trail alignments which are consistent with MSCP preservation goals.
- c. Locate canyon and other open space trails to take advantage of existing pathways and maintenance easements where possible and appropriate.
- d. Design, construct and manage trails to:
 - Consider the context and sensitivity of the area they traverse.
 - Protect and preserve sensitive natural and cultural resources.
 - Provide for safe and enjoyable use using best practices (e.g. user management).
 - Be sustainable and minimize maintenance using best practices (e.g. erosion control).
- e. Ensure that trails that are considered to be a part of the City's trail system meet one or more of the City's definitions of what constitutes a trail (see Glossary).
- f. Allow for the closure of existing public trails where such trails are unsafe, unsustainable, redundant, serve only a single private property, lack legal public access, and/or unnecessarily impact environmentally sensitive areas.