



5 ENGAGING SPACES

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



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

Goal

Highly desirable parks, greenways, arts and cultural amenities that support high-quality experiences for residents and visitors.

Purpose

When College Station residents were asked to rank enhancements that would make College Station a better place to live and work, more parks, greenways, and entertainment were among the top choices. Also ranking high were environmental protection, recreation facilities, addressing drainage and flooding concerns, and community image and appearance. Residents view parks, greenways, and the arts as necessities in College Station. These amenities improve the character and livability of a city and warrant a significant level of attention and commitment of resources. Planning and investing in these assets are expected and appreciated by current residents, business owners, and visitors.

The purpose of this chapter is to recognize and ensure the continued protection and enhancement of leisure, recreation, and cultural opportunities available to the residents of College Station through parks, greenways, and the arts. College Station enjoys a diverse and educated citizenry who support and celebrate this vital component of local quality of life. The City recognizes the value of the natural environment and its effects upon the physical and mental health of its citizens.

This chapter sets the framework for the City's parks and recreation system and greenways program. The City has two topic-specific planning efforts that delve into greater detail regarding the actions and measures needed to maintain and grow the City's parks and recreation system and greenways program. These are the **Recreation, Park, and Open Space Master Plan**, adopted in 2011 and undergoing a major update in 2021, and the **Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Greenways Master Plan**, adopted in 2010 and updated in 2018. The City of College Station offers its residents a wide variety of recreation and leisure experiences in locations across the community.

Existing Conditions

The City of College Station strives to be a leader and innovator in parks and recreation facilities, greenways preservation, events, programs and cultural amenities.

The City's parks and greenways span almost 2,000 acres, as viewed in [Map 5.1, Parks and Greenways](#). City-owned greenway property has been transferred into the parks system in recent years to enhance its access and public awareness, increase its protection, and provide better connectivity between parks and greenways. While greenways can provide recreational and mobility purposes, this does not diminish the role that greenways play in floodplain and storm water management and conservation of the natural environment.

The parks and recreation system includes a variety of athletic fields and courts, pavilions, biking and walking trails, exercise stations, playgrounds, dog parks, senior centers, and swimming pools. Other facilities include an amphitheater and festival site, a skate park, a full-service recreation center, two cemeteries, a nature center, and an inventory of flat athletic fields and diamonds that routinely host state and national tournaments for a variety of sports. Programs range from aquatics and swim lessons, athletic leagues for all ages, and afterschool care to entertainment with the Starlight Music Series and educational classes.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The City's goal is to achieve seven acres of parkland per 1,000 citizens. A combination of standards-based and resource-based approaches are used to assess the need for additional parks, recreation facilities, and greenways within College Station. The potential need for additional parkland acreage to satisfy current and future demands is determined by applying the recommended standards to the current and future population of the City.

In 2018, a comprehensive needs assessment was initiated by City staff, employing the firm of National Service Research. The

purpose of the study was to provide guidance regarding park, recreation and open space to meet citizen needs and priorities. The key objectives selected were to identify frequency of park and recreation use, maintenance rating of parks and recreation facilities, recreation programs of interest, and park facility needs.

These approaches provide a comprehensive analysis for future additions to the parks and recreation system as well as the greenway system. The [Recreation, Park, and Open Space Master Plan](#) and the [Bicycle, Pedestrian and Greenways Master Plan](#) further detail the land, facility, and program needs that surfaced through planning processes and outline the practices City staff will employ to achieve these objectives.



Parks & Greenways



- | | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 SUMMIT CROSSING | 33 SOUTHWEST |
| 2 CRESCENT POINTE | 34 GEORGIE K. FITCH |
| 3 VETERANS PARK & ATHLETIC COMPLEX | 35 LONGMIRE |
| 4 UNIVERSITY | 36 SANDSTONE |
| 5 BILLIE MADELY | 37 STEEPLECHASE |
| 6 NORTHGATE | 38 BARRACKS II |
| 7 FIRST DOWN | 39 BROTHERS POND |
| 8 LIONS | 40 WOODCREEK |
| 9 EASTGATE | 41 JACK & DOROTHY MILLER |
| 10 THOMAS | 42 BRIAN BACHMANN |
| 11 PARKWAY | 43 EDELWEISS |
| 12 RICHARD CARTER | 44 MIDTOWN RESERVE |
| 13 MERRY OAKS | 45 EDELWEISS GARTENS |
| 14 BRISON | 46 CREEK VIEW |
| 15 OAKS | 47 HUNTINGTON TRAIL |
| 16 WINDWOOD | 48 M.D. WHEELER PH 2 |
| 17 SMITH TRACT | 49 TEXAS INDEPENDENCE BALLPARK |
| 18 W.A. TARROW | 50 WOODLAND HILLS |
| 19 LUTHER JONES | 51 SONOMA |
| 20 ANDERSON | 52 REATTA MEADOWS |
| 21 WOLF PEN CREEK | 53 SOUTHERN OAKS |
| 22 ART & MYRA BRIGHT | 54 BRIDGEWOOD |
| 23 CARTER'S CROSSING | 55 CASTLEROCK |
| 24 JOHN CROMPTON | 56 PHILLIPS |
| 25 SOUTHLAND | 57 WALLACE LAKE |
| 26 GABBARD | 58 CASTLEGATE |
| 27 LEMONTREE | 59 PEBBLE CREEK |
| 28 BEE CREEK | 60 LICK CREEK |
| 29 CY MILLER | 61 ETONBURY |
| 30 STEPHEN C. BEACHY CENTRAL | 62 GREENS PRAIRIE RESERVE |
| 31 HEADLAKE | 63 WILDWOOD |
| 32 EMERALD FOREST | 64 COVE OF NANTUCKET |

- PARKS
- GREENWAYS
- CEMETERIES

Planning Considerations

College Station's residents identified various issues and opportunities facing the community regarding parks, greenways, and the arts. The planning considerations highlighted in this section helped shape the action recommendations that follow.

Growth and changing demographic trends are important components in determining the development of parks, greenways, and the arts. College Station has a projected annual growth rate of 2.8% based on trends from 2010-2020 and is projected to increase to more than 162,500 residents by 2030.¹ An increasing population creates demand for an increased and diverse offering of programs, facilities, and open space to maintain current levels of service. Although school and college-aged residents will continue to make up a large portion of the population, residents of retirement age are the fastest growing demographic. This may present a need for more passive recreation opportunities in the future in a system currently geared towards more active recreation.



MAINTAINING A PREMIER PARKS AND RECREATION SYSTEM

City staff have identified five pillars to approach the strategic and ongoing actions of the parks and recreation system in a goal-oriented, systematic fashion:

Experience & Engagement: Create a positive and memorable experience for all customers. Strive to involve and request input from all park and program participants. Create public awareness of all programs, facilities, and greenspace.

Capital, Operational & Maintenance Funding: Identify and establish desirable alternatives to fund all aspects of projects, operations, and maintenance.

Natural Resource Management: Protection of the wildlife, plants, water, and soil of an area, with a particular focus on quality of life and stewardship.

Growth & Sustainability: Employ and track the demographics and growth patterns of the City to maintain, secure, and develop desirable greenspace and facilities.

Accessibility & Inclusion: Inclusive and accessible design, affordable pricing and implementation of programs, activities and facilities that takes into consideration the diversity of the population.

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

Balanced, Convenient, and Accessible Park System

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

A comprehensive parks and recreation system also offers a variety of parks, ranging in size and focus to satisfy diverse social and ecological needs. Greenways now fall under the umbrella of this system and provide linear connections with trails where appropriate. A variety of indoor and outdoor facilities and spaces, as well as an adequate assortment of activities and programs, should be provided to meet the individual and collective needs of all the residents of College Station.

Quality Park Appearance and Maintenance

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

Facilities and programs such as the Fun for All Playground that focuses on providing interactive learning opportunities for all ability levels, the Lick Creek Nature Center educational programming, and the renovation and expansion of the Lincoln Recreation Center are just a few of the ways the City demonstrates its commitment to a well maintained, diverse parks system that positively contributes to citizens' quality of life. Moreover, the Parks & Recreation Department hosts seasonal events to better serve the community and partners with the Economic Development & Tourism Department to promote sports tourism as both an experience and an economic driver for the community.

Coordination, Collaboration, and Adequate Funding

As the City continues to grow and develop, College Station will see an increased demand for parks and recreation facilities and programs. To meet this increasing demand, mechanisms that encourage joint acquisition, development, and funding of public spaces will help the City to stretch local resources for the development and redevelopment of its parks. City coordination and collaboration with agencies, such as Brazos County, the College Station Independent School District, the City of Bryan, Texas A&M University, developers, and other local agencies and organizations mutually benefit all interests because it eases the municipal tax burden related to parks and recreation demands and enhances the quality of parks and recreation facilities and programs.

Collaboration requires effective communication and coordination among stakeholders. Through agreements reached between public/semi-public agencies, as well as partnerships with the private sector, the parks and recreation system can benefit in the quality and quantity of facilities and programs it offers. Joint acquisition, construction, operation, and maintenance allow more efficient use of public resources while



ensuring that the system is well-coordinated and connected. Effectively leveraging State and Federal grants and private foundation funds is also important to developing and sustaining a parks and recreation system for the long term.

ENHANCING THE GREENWAYS PROGRAM

The purpose of the Greenways Program is to establish a network of greenways or open space corridors throughout the community for conservation and to connect people and places through greenway trails for recreation and transportation. Considerations for the community include: (1) promoting the protection of land to maximize use and enjoyment and the natural resource stewardship through preservation, conservation and restoration, as well as (2) creating connections to key destinations with greenway trails.

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

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

Greenways provide functional, aesthetic, economic, and social benefits to the community. From a functional and aesthetic perspective, greenways provide for floodplain and stormwater management, water quality protection, as well as wildlife and aquatic habitat protection. From a social and economic perspective, greenways introduce trails in appropriate locations that provide alternative modes of transportation, recreation, increased real estate values to adjacent properties, and tourist revenue.



Connection of Parks, Schools, and Neighborhoods

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

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



Natural Resource Stewardship through Conservation, Preservation, and Restoration

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

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

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

ARTS, CULTURE, AND OTHER LEISURE ACTIVITIES

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

The City recognizes the need for leisure activities and provides an ample variety of opportunities ranging from soccer fields to aquatic recreation opportunities to youth educational programming. Furthermore, the City provides sports leagues and instructional classes to all ages and abilities. Finally, the network of parks throughout the City offers great views and endless opportunities to explore nature.

The City's Role in the Arts

In taking a direct role as both a promoter and purveyor of leisure time pursuits, the City recognizes the range of interests and abilities that are found across the community. With limited funds and staffing, both within municipal government and among its various private and nonprofit partners, the City faces the challenge of being responsive to diverse wants and needs while attempting to focus on core offerings so that high quality facilities and/or services can be provided and maintained over time. The City also plays a role in more passive aspects, such as providing support for public art installations which make a statement about the community and enhance its image at gateway locations, along key corridors, and within parks and greenways. The City supports nonprofit organizations that seek to increase the quantity of and access to public art. A wide array of existing public art is available throughout the City, including sculptures, fiber art, theater and performing arts, and literature and poetry. More than 60 regional nonprofit arts, culture, and heritage affiliate organizations are represented by the Arts Council of the Brazos Valley.



Strategic & Ongoing Actions

Based on the considerations above and balancing input from the 2018 Needs Assessment, Council strategic initiatives, the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board, and the Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Greenways Advisory Board the actions below aim to implement the goal of highly desirable parks, greenways, and arts and cultural amenities that support high-quality experiences for residents and visitors. The actions include new, strategic items as well as ongoing efforts undertaken by the City.

The **Recreation, Park, and Open Space Master Plan** and the **Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Greenways Master Plan** further detail the land, facility, and program needs of the parks and recreation and greenways systems.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS

- 5.1 Continue to support, promote, and operate major arts, entertainment, sporting, and cultural destinations.** Utilize digital platforms and coordinate with the Economic Development & Tourism Department to promote cultural and entertainment offerings. Promote the multi-purpose mission of the Wolf Pen Creek and Northgate Districts as live music destinations and areas to live, work, and play.
- 5.2 Maintain and expand community-based greenway and open space preservation programs.** Through the Adopt-a-Greenway and parks volunteer programs, continue involving neighborhood and community groups in preservation and maintenance programs.
- 5.3 Continue to expand outreach about the parks and greenway system.** Enhance awareness and accessibility to programs and facilities through the City's website, publications, and media outlets.
- 5.4 Support a community-wide public art program.** Contribute to the expansion of a public art program in conjunction with the Arts Council of Brazos Valley, the City of Bryan, Texas A&M University, and the Texas Department of Transportation.
- 5.5 Continue leisure, health, and educational programming.** Continue the City's role in offering leisure, health, and educational activities to citizens of all ages through the City's Parks & Recreation department programming.
- 5.6 Identify and secure public and private funds for the acquisition of parks, greenways, and facilities.** Ensure adequate parkland and greenway provisions through the Parkland Dedication Ordinance, the Capital Improvements Program, annual budgets, City property acquisition programs, external dollars, foundations, and public-private partnerships. Explore opportunities for connections between developments, conservation easements, or additional provisions that require dedication of open space.
- 5.7 Continue inter-agency coordination and establish new public-private partnerships to provide additional amenities, funding, networking, and co-production opportunities.** Seek partnerships with other public agencies and public-private partnerships to provide recreational amenities, greenways, and services where mutually beneficial opportunities are available.

- 5.8 Evaluate, amend, and develop relevant ordinances to protect natural resources, habitats, and green-water infrastructure.** Consider amendments to the Parkland Dedication Ordinance and other ordinances to include provisions or incentives that encourage developers to design and build parks and greenway trails that preserve natural areas.
- 5.9 Investigate the feasibility of incorporating riparian buffer standards to preserve sensitive land along waterways.** Consider the feasibility of amending ordinances to better preserve potentially sensitive land along waterways to mitigate flood risks, protect water quality, and provide for parks and greenway opportunities.
- 5.10 Consider new and enhanced natural resource management strategies that promote environmental sustainability and stewardship and improve quality of life.** Consider the effect of urban heat islands on the City's residents, wildlife, and natural environment. Identify areas for enhanced stewardship practices such as "no mow zones," native or adaptive plantings, and pollinator areas to support wildlife and enhance biodiversity.
- 5.11 Invest in the redevelopment of existing parks.** Identify new improvements and continue upgrades and maintenance to existing park facilities, particularly neighborhood scale parks as detailed in the Recreation, Park, and Open Space Master Plan, neighborhood, or district plans.
- 5.12 Conduct community-wide parks and recreation needs assessments and pursue recommended improvements.** Evaluate facilities and programs provided by the Parks and Recreation Department through community surveys at least every five years. Pursue new programs, physical and operational improvements, and evaluate ongoing priorities to implement the needs assessment for park facilities and recreational programs.
- 5.13 Identify a land acquisition strategy and integrate additional greenspace.** Establish a platform to provide a required and desirable amount of land per citizen, as discussed within the planning considerations.
- 5.14 Create connections between key elements of the parks, recreation, greenways systems, and destinations.** As described in the Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Greenways Master Plan and the Recreation, Park, and Open Space Master Plan, prioritize opportunities to connect parks, greenways, community facilities, and other destinations.
- 5.15 Design and construct inclusive, accessible, and sustainable parks and greenway trails.** Consider all citizens' needs and provide a diverse range of facilities and amenities to accommodate a variety of experiences and ways of interacting with the world. Encourage developments that are oriented towards and designed for accessibility to parks and greenway trails.