



SECTION 12: PARK AND RECREATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Park System Vision

Any component within this Comprehensive Plan would have difficulty drawing more public input than issues relating to transportation or land use. Despite the generally overwhelming concern for these two issues, few participants passed on the opportunity to comment on the state of the City's park system.

In an almost unanimous voice, citizens speaking during the various public workshops and design charrettes touted the need to fund an expanded and improved park system. Participants also seemed dissatisfied with the current state of priority park land acquisition, construction, and maintenance received in terms of City budgets.

***"The two main things on my mind for the community are parks... including green belts and hiking and biking trails. [And also] attracting businesses to the community. I don't think we can afford not to try to get some industry and other types of businesses into the area to support our growth."
- Joni Burdett***

***"The City should strive to create a regional park... if you think about it a lot of the communities that make a bigger impression are the ones that have nice waterscape facilities for the kids... passive things you can do... that has to be a larger size park so that we can accommodate not only the soccer players but also the elderly people over here playing checkers... I don't want to take away from the smaller parks but in my opinion a larger park with some kind of hike and bike trail system makes a lot of sense."
- Mark Sweeney***

Participants also stressed the desire to use the park system as a mechanism for generating increased tourism as an element of the local economy. When talking about park systems that they liked from other cities, many speakers returned to the notion that Whitehouse could use high-quality parks and trails to not

only attract visitors, but also boost the City's chances of recruiting compatible business and industry.



***"Right now Whitehouse has only one attraction and that's the school system. We've got to offer other attractions. Improved parks and the Town Center are good steps toward accomplishing that goal."
- Dale Moran***

This type of system would rely on a variety of park sizes and functions as well as an interconnecting system of pedestrian or biking trails. The park and recreation system was frequently viewed as a potential draw for the City of Whitehouse beyond its

good schools and convenient location within East Texas.

Park Zones

Recommendations for ongoing park and recreation planning will be made through the establishment of park planning zones as with other components of this Comprehensive Plan. Because the same factors impacting land use and transportation also affect park planning the zones will be delineated and identified in the same way. Park Zone 1 is located in the City's northeastern quadrant with numbering progressing clockwise to the northwestern quadrant, Park Zone 4.

Park Acquisition Policies

General Needs

The park system components maintained by the City of Whitehouse fall short of national standards. Though well located, equipped, and maintained the two existing City parks are insufficient to meet the recreational demands of a young and growing community.

Thanks to generous accessibility management policies by other government entities, many residents have alternate choices for recreation. However, the City should not count on provisions made by other entities for such a large portion of the recreational system. This assumption is particularly problematic for park facilities owned by neighborhood associations or religious institutions.



It is vital that the City expand upon both the quantity and diversity of the existing park system. Spatial location of parks providing for safe and quick pedestrian access to facilities for a larger percentage of the population should also become a serious consideration for Whitehouse.

Co-Location and Coordination with Other Entities

***"An athletic/recreational complex might be an area where partnering with the School District makes a lot of sense... it could be a partnership where you're saving money for both the City and the School District, and getting a lot more bang for your buck. The High School campus is a perfect location for that."
- Mark Sweeney***

While the City needs to expand its own inventory of park facilities, it is also recommended that formal partnerships be established with other entities providing recreational services within the City. The most likely partner would be WISD. This partnership could include simply

posting similarly designed signage clearly explaining hours of operation and usage rules for both the City and School District parks. A more beneficial partnership would extend to joint planning efforts relating to park/school connectivity and trail development. If administratively possible, both entities might also benefit from the coordination of maintenance staff and equipment. When new schools are proposed, co-location of park facilities could drastically reduce maintenance and land costs for both organizations while maximizing the benefit to community members and students.

Developer Dedications and Parkland Dedication Requirements through Platting

The availability of funds has been a consistent impediment to park system improvements. The lack of budget availability for

***"If a landowner came up and had a nice spot in a nice development and said 'here you go City I'm giving you a Park.' We weren't expecting that donation so we don't have the funds or the people [to maintain it]. So it's kind of one of those things where [it is] not so much where is the money going to come from, but rather how is the City going to develop and maintain that park [without having planned for it]?"
- Danny Hogden***



maintenance is also the primary factor in recent decisions regarding developer dedications of land.

A parkland dedication ordinance is a mechanism discussed during public involvement which could provide maintenance funds, parkland, and a more predictable pace of land dedication. Parkland dedication is adopted through the Subdivision

"As a resident of Whitehouse I would appreciate it if the City proportionally shifted the burden of new park land development and maintenance onto the future residents. It's not fair that as a resident of Whitehouse, I should be responsible for fully financing new parks for new subdivisions."

- Mark Sweeney

Regulations and functions as a condition of platting in the same way that the dedication of residential streets and infrastructure are handled. As with those dedications, money and land for park development is used for only the section of the City that the residential development is located within. The ordinance is a way to shift the cost of a new park development from existing homeowners to the new residents creating the need for expanded facilities.

The ordinance would establish standards requiring the dedication of both parkland and money for maintenance based on the number of housing units proposed on the plat. The Parks Board would be permitted to accept a fee in lieu of land because some development conditions might not permit the dedication of land. Parkland dedication ordinances typically set minimums to protect individual or small builders allowing for the elimination of the land dedication requirement for projects under a certain size. Although adoption of parkland dedication ordinances has not become commonplace within East Texas, the practice is regularly implemented in other areas of the State. These include both large and small cities near Dallas/Fort Worth, San Antonio/Austin, Houston, and throughout Central Texas. Given the success of these programs, it is likely that parkland dedication will become commonplace throughout East Texas as well. At the time of this project, the only community within East Texas to adopt parkland dedication requirements is the City of Lindale. As this ordinance was only recently passed, the details of its implementation and long-term success have not been analyzed.



***"My thought process is that we should be asking more from our developers, both residential and commercial... if they're going to build here then they need to contribute... it's an investment."
- Jan Bellefeuille***

Money dedicated for maintenance must not only be used within the Park Zone surrounding the developing residential project, it must also be used within a certain amount of time. In this way, the parkland dedication ordinance does not

become a general park fundraiser, but is used to benefit the residential developer's customers on the timeframe obvious to the homebuyer in time to serve as an "amenity" for the developer's neighborhood. In order for park construction to occur within this timeframe, a clear Parks Plan should be in place and land and money dedications must be made at the time of plat approval. Residential developers must be assured that a properly designed ordinance would operate less as a fee and more as an investment and selling point for homes.

Such an ordinance not only provides the City with potential parkland and money for land acquisition or development, but also allows the City to accurately anticipate and plan for park development and ongoing maintenance. Therefore,

***"If you go to Tyler right now 90% of the developing that's going on is large corporate investor development... they have the means [to do parkland dedication]... would Whitehouse be able to attract [developers] with those things implemented? [Would we get a developer] that could still walk out of it and say 'it was worth it for us to develop here.' I'm all for parks [but I don't want to] set the standards so high [that we lose all development]."
- Darrell Crymes***

the recommendations contained within this Plan and subsequent park planning documents can be accomplished according to a timely and predictable schedule.

***"We [the City] want to be fair to the developers, but we [also] want to be fair to the residents of Whitehouse."
- Mark Sweeney***

However implemented, it is important for the City to follow the many court tested formulas for land and money dedication. Officials should also closely examine the impact the ordinance can place on developers and strike an appropriate balance between requiring a fair contribution and placing an undue burden on builders.



It is also recommended that the Parks Board establish criteria when considering land dedicated through platting, land gifts by individuals/developers, or real estate acquisitions for new parks. The term "litmus test" was used frequently during public involvement to establish what types of land should be accepted or purchased.

"I think there really has to be a litmus test... if you look at a lot of the parkland that the City has been given, a lot of it is the unusable land... so in essence there ought to be a litmus test that says 'does this meet what we want in that area, does it comply with the Master Plan?'"

- Mark Sweeney

This test should include specific descriptions of land meeting certain criteria of appropriateness. It is also important that such a test allow for differing criteria between land for parks, and greenbelt land which may one day be used for trails or environmental protection.

This Plan can also be used as a general guide of where Whitehouse would like to be in terms of park development over the next 15 years. This Plan and other subsequent park plans are critical components of determining if land proposed for dedication could contribute to the envisioned park system or simply drain money away from other projects by requiring maintenance of "leftover" land within the subdivision.

Ongoing Planning

Community Needs Assessment

A theme repeated throughout public involvement was that the City should focus on providing park facilities which meet the specific needs of community members. The desire expressed was for parks which specialize in activities and recreation enjoyed by neighboring residents.

"We've talked about wanting Whitehouse to be a destination rather than to be a pass-through to somewhere else... [attractive regional parks] could be part of the destination that we want Whitehouse to be."

- Suzanne Loudamy



"The City fo Whitehouse was really on the verge of having something the last time we proposed a trail along Whitehouse Creek. We had some opposition, but we moved too slow on it... we could've had that half a million-dollar grant if we had just built what we could get at the time."

- Dale Moran

Because it is beyond the scope of this Plan to identify specific park amenities, it is strongly recommended that the City charge the Parks Board with the task of conducting additional research into what activities residents want and need. It is also important that the City understand what balance is most

appropriate between smaller mini and neighborhood parks with community or regional parks. This additional planning work should be conducted as soon as possible in order to efficiently accommodate the dedication of parkland through residential development.

It is also vital that the City engage the public in an ongoing park planning process. Previous attempts at establishing a trail system through existing neighborhoods faltered partly due to bad timing, but largely as a result of poor communication and failed consensus building with landowners within the individual neighborhoods. That experience has

"What you're going to have to do is give the citizens of the City ownership of [this park] project... it's got to start with the citizens and move to City Hall. A trail system through existing neighborhoods will have to be a grassroots effort that the City facilitates."

- Dale Moran

led some to believe that ongoing park planning needs to be a "grassroots" effort.

"[We talked about a tipping point, well] we want to be prepared when that point comes [so we can] say 'Here's the Plan.' Not be scrambling [to just react to development]."

- Jan Bellefeuille

As a result, this and other planning efforts should not be viewed as the only options for further system development. By working with community members on their terms, the City can act as a facilitator to benefit from the energy and ideas of the people most closely impacted by the proposals.



Park Linkages

An Off-street Trail System

One of the goals of a park system is to promote the health of the community's citizens. Establishing a well-connected system allowing for pedestrian access into and between individual parks is becoming increasingly important in

this effort. In that way, off-street trails become not only a linkage between components of the system but a critical recreational component themselves.

"I'm for anything that gets more people out and about walking, cycling, and jogging... because, I think we want to be a healthy community, to be known as a City that facilitates good health for everyone, from little kids to old-timers... and physical activity is a big part of that."
- Jim Schwane

"To me, if you start out with a park image... that becomes part of your civic image... you're really talking about one and the same thing."
- Jan Bellefeuille

These linkages also provide for extension of the park system into satisfaction of other portions of this Plan's goals. Through proper implementation, trails can not only benefit residential projects, but also serve to enhance commercial development. For example, many

successful town center concepts have utilized not only pedestrian-friendly design within the district, but have incorporated recreational linkages to natural water features or parks to further enhance the overall "product." The residential and recreational components can supply customers for pedestrian districts without the need for additional parking. While at the same time, these districts can provide for a "destination" for the trail system reducing the need for parking and other facilities within the trail system itself.

The trail system should easily accommodate phasing and be viewed as modular. The general recommendations of this Plan combined with the specifics which can result from ongoing City facilitated

"If we want to go 'this' far but the money only goes 'that' far, then we go 'that' far... then we do what we can do to go [the rest of the way] the next time."
- Suzanne Loudamy



park planning will provide the necessary blueprint to allow for this phasing. For example, the Blackhawk Creek channel was frequently identified through both the 1995 Plan and public involvement for this project as a highly attractive corridor for linear park and trail development.

By establishing the long-range design of this corridor individual sections can be developed independently with the knowledge that eventually the entire trail will connect. This process can function in much the same way thoroughfare planning phases road construction with land development. In fact, this Comprehensive Plan includes two general trail alignments within the Thoroughfare Plan itself.

"At one time we had everything dedicated [to build a trail] from south of Cain to 346 [and lost it]... there was only one place with real resistance, we had it everywhere else... if we could have just started it from there and let it prove itself [it could have shown people how a trail would work]."

– Debbie Shafer

This phasing will allow the City to focus on some achievable objectives without risking the individual pieces by attempting to accomplish everything at once. Phased development also permits the success of one component to build

"This [part of the trail system along Blackhawk Creek] is really neat in terms of potential for development... as that develops and shows that it works maybe individuals in other neighborhoods would say 'Oh wait a minute why don't we connect [near our neighborhood]?"

– Jim Schwane

momentum for completion of the entire project and other related plans. This is particularly important in order to convince skeptical homeowners who have concerns regarding trail extension through their neighborhoods.



Gross Park Acreage Needs

Current and Build-out Acreage Needs By Type

Current Needs

Taking an average of the various population estimates reveals that the City is

Year	Population Projection	Acreage Needed for Mini Parks	Acreage Needed for Neighborhood Parks	Acreage Needed for Community Parks
2005	7,007	surplus	8.9	51
build-out	28,232	9	51.4	220.8

Table 12.1: Park type needs for both the current population and for the population expected at full build-out

currently housing 7,007 residents within the City Limits. Counting only parks maintained by public institutions, the community currently meets the national standards for acreage provisions of mini parks (Table 12.1). In order to meet the recommendations for neighborhood parks the City must construct an additional 8.9 acres of this park type. The City also needs to construct 51 acres within one or more community parks to meet the recommendations for that classification.

Build-out Needs

While the current needs only account for residents living within the City Limits, a full build-out analysis requires that all residents living within the ETJ be included in the needs assessment. As explained in the Demographic Section, vacant land within the City Limits and ETJ can eventually support approximately 28,232 residents under current conditions of land use consumption ratios. The planned land use identified for this Plan is slightly more intense in terms of residential development and overall land use share than existing conditions; therefore, it is conceivable that the ultimate build-out for the community may be even higher than 28,232. The most volatile variable in determining the ultimate build-out will be the residential density within the ETJ.

Despite the uncertainty, it is reasonable to assume that land within the City Limits and ETJ will support at least the same densities of residential development



as currently exist. Therefore, using a build-out population of 28,232 residents in this parkland needs assessment is valid.

Table 12.1 (Page 258) displays the number of acres of each park type necessary to meet nationally recommended standards at full build-out. At that time the City needs to have constructed over 51 acres of neighborhood parks and 221 acres of community parks.

Spatial Orientation Needs by Type

Raw acreage standards only account for part of the formula used for determining a community's park and recreation needs. The standards also indicate that a city should locate parks of each of the three classifications in a way that provides for reasonable access to each site from every home. The concept provides for service areas of a certain diameter around a park. Major transportation corridors and land use conditions can impact the service areas. However, for the purpose of this analysis a simple buffer will be calculated around each existing and proposed park site.

It is also important to state that the recommended park sites were located in order to provide the most efficient service area coverage for each park type. On the Plan maps these parks are represented by circles of various diameters indicating the recommended acreage. The final design and layout of each park site may vary dramatically from the abstract recommendations of this Plan. Therefore, finding the most efficient location for each park was given priority with less concern paid to existing conditions near the sites.

Before going further with the recommendations, it is important to briefly discuss how the City's density impacts the applicability of national park standards. When defining various park sites, these standards not only express a typical service area, but also establish a minimum park size necessary to permit the recommended activity types within each category. Because Whitehouse is a relatively sprawling community dominated by single-family homes, the



recommended park size, service area, and total acreage per population figures do not easily tie in with each other.

Serving the entire low density population with the established service areas would either require smaller than recommended parks or a higher total provision of park acreage than would otherwise be needed for a City of this size. For that reason, it will be necessary to "borrow" some acreage from the largest park category (community) in order to have neighborhood and mini parks of a sufficient size. Reducing the overall provision of land within community parks will not bring these new park sites below the recommended standards, nor will it impact their service areas.

Neighborhood Parks

The analysis will begin with neighborhood parks which provide the most flexibility and rely strongly on locations of other parks within the system. The only two existing neighborhood parks within the City are the City Park on Main Street and the Little League Ball Fields. It is necessary to evenly distribute the recommended park sites throughout the community



Image 12.1: Children playing on the playground equipment at the City Park on Main Street

since neighborhood parks have a service area of only one half mile. Though many park visitors will drive from their homes to these parks, it is also beneficial to the community to provide such park sites within walking distance of established and planned neighborhoods.



The recommended acreage of a neighborhood park is 10 to 15 acres. As a result of Whitehouse's density characteristics, 14 new neighborhood parks are recommended throughout the City each with an approximate size of 14 acres. Map 12.1 (Page 262) displays the general location of each recommended park site in order to encompass the largest number of homes within a neighborhood park service area. These parks should be constructed by the time development within the current City Limits and ETJ reaches full residential build-out.

Because the jurisdictional limits in the northeastern portion of the City are fixed, it is difficult to provide this level of service to 100% of the homes in that area without expending limited City

Park Type	Percent of Homes Served at Build-Out
Neighborhood Parks	84%
Community Parks	100%

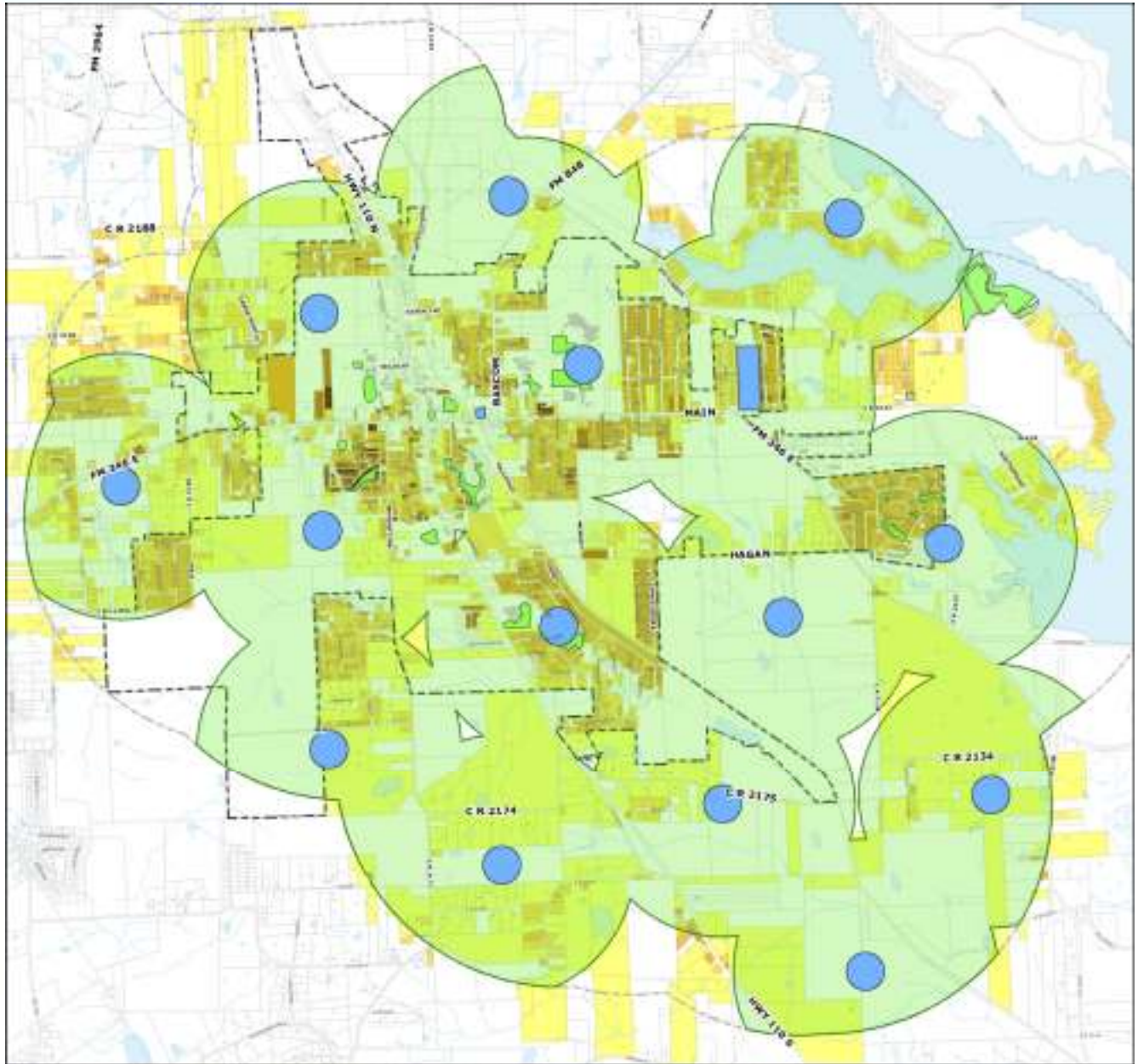
Table 12.2: Percentage of the City's population living within the service area of each park type

resources on park sites near the jurisdictional boundaries between Whitehouse and Tyler's ETJ. However, the proposed arrangement locates parks within the recommended service areas of 84% of the homes within both the ETJ and City Limits (Table 12.2). This arrangement meets or exceeds most of the national standards regarding neighborhood park provisions within a community.

***"My hope tonight is that something positive can be done with our [Waterton] greenbelt... which runs from our subdivision to the lake. [Ultimately] I think the area would be a wonderful place for a City park."
- Will Graves***

Some existing City land could be utilized for neighborhood parks. One possible location is within the large Waterton neighborhood. The residential developer dedicated several parcels of land within the subdivision for green space or parkland.

Neighborhood park facilities could also be created by linking several smaller spaces which are located in very close proximity to each other. For example, connecting the existing Garden View Park with facilities at Cain Elementary with a hike and bike trail would allow for a linear park system. Several mini parks could also be located within the system offering specific recreational services to school children, families in the neighborhood, or seniors living at the retirement center.



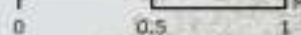
Map 12.1: Abstract Recommended Neighborhood Park System

- Recommended Park Sites
- Existing Parks/Open Space
- Service Areas of Recommended Parks
- Built Structures
- Whitehouse City/ETJ Limits

- Population Distribution
(persons per acre)
- 0 - 2
 - 3 - 5
 - 6 - 10
 - 11 - 15
 - 16 - 20
 - 21 - 30
 - 31 - 50



City of Whitehouse
Geographic Information System



The recommended park sites on this and other maps within the Parks and Recreation Section of this Comprehensive Plan are general in nature. This map accurately represents the recommended acreage of each park site but not specific locations or site design. The recommended parks should be located and designed in a manner which is compatible with existing development and responsive to local conditions. About the image: The image is an artistic rendering of homes located on Lake Tyler's waterfront, within Whitehouse's ETJ. Whitehouse High School is also visible on the far horizon.



Community Parks

Because the City's density characteristics required the reassignment of some community park acreage for neighborhood park usage, the Plan calls for just under 140 acres of community parks to be constructed by full community build-out. This recommendation easily meets the minimum size requirements for a community park facility which is 25 acres.

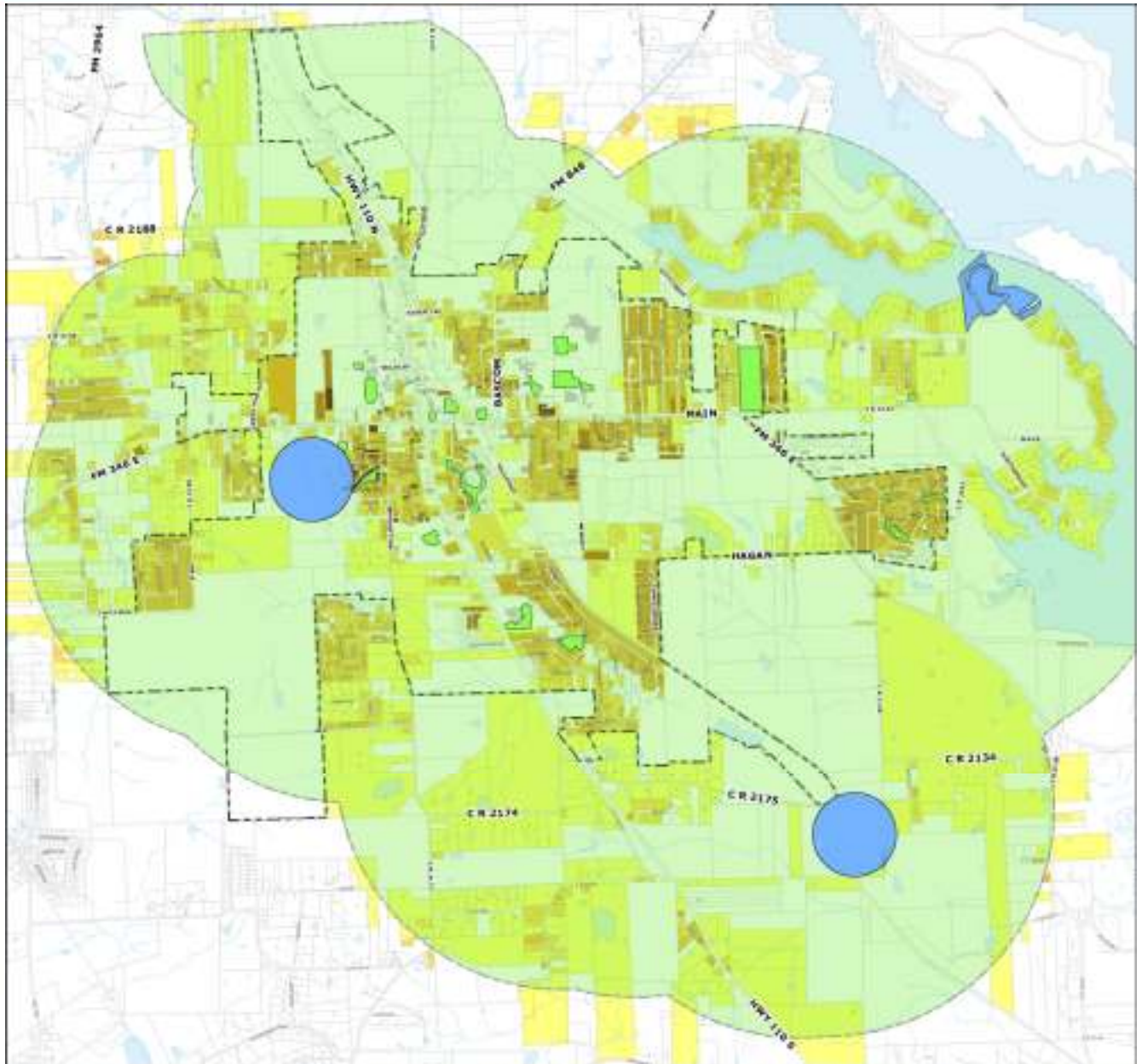
Map 12.2 (Page 264) displays the recommended park sites and service areas. As with the neighborhood park map these sites do not necessarily represent the final location for each park. However, the abstract circles do represent the correct amount of acreage and are located in

***"I'd be for parks any way they can come up, but what I'm hunting for is that 27 acre multiuse area... I should be able to find a spot for you, if I can find the money to buy it."
- Danny Hogden***

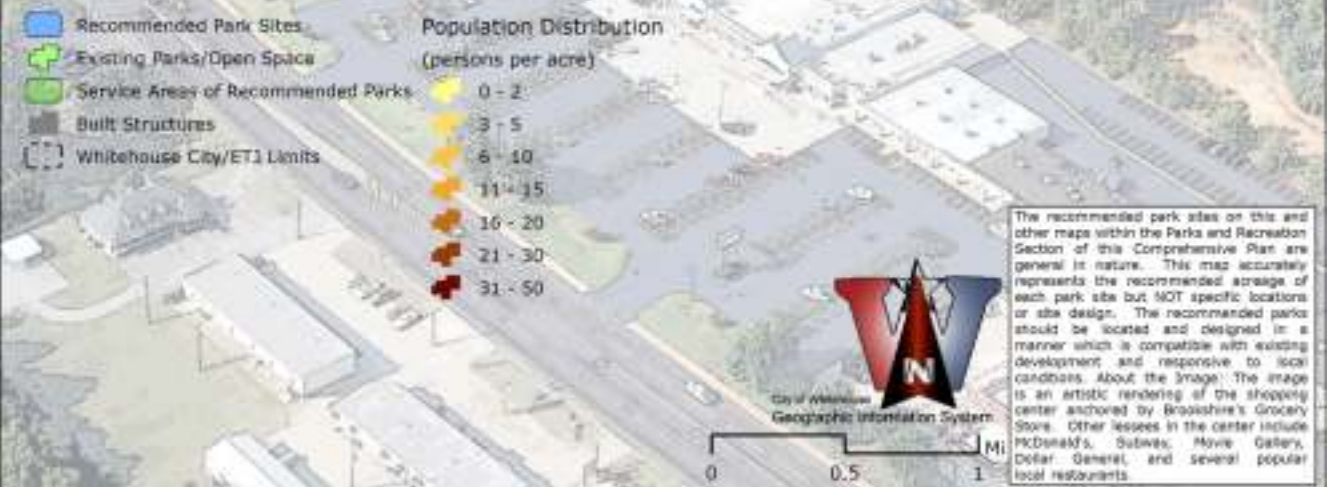
a way which maximizes the service areas of new and existing community park facilities. When selecting the final site and park design City officials will have more flexibility with community parks because such facilities have a service area of 2 miles in all directions. Community parks also generally house recreational activities less dependent on quick pedestrian access. Therefore, service areas for these parks are less impacted by major thoroughfares. In fact, strong vehicular access is very advantageous for this park type. All of the homes (100%) within the City Limits and ETJ lie within the service areas of the recommended and existing community parks (Table 12.2, Page 261).

Mini Parks

Currently the City is providing a sufficient amount of raw acreage of mini parks. However, the spatial distribution of these parks does not meet recommended standards. For example, Park Zone/Planning Area 3 (southwestern quadrant) lacks public parks entirely. One administrative change that could increase the effective availability of such park space would be partnerships with semi-public organizations such as churches to permit usage of outdoor recreational facilities by nonmembers. Several subdivisions, such as Rosebrook and West Lake, also have common spaces equipped with playground equipment.



Map 12.2: Abstract Recommended Community Park System





Access agreements (in exchange for City maintenance assistance) with these Homeowners' Associations could also play a role. These agreements would



Image 12.2: Many park uses can be accommodated within mini parks. Dog parks, facilities where people can bring their dogs together in a leash free environment for socialization, have thrived on a variety of park sizes throughout the State. A dog park was built on Metro right-of-way in Houston, Texas near the Uptown District on a long but narrow strip of land (top). This park was developed on land previously considered as "leftover" after road construction for the West Park Toll Way was completed. The Millie Bush Bark Park is also located within Houston on a significantly larger site constituting a park classified as neighborhood or community (right).



permit outside usage and also increase the mini park saturation throughout presently underserved portions of the City. National standards recommend that at build-out, a city of Whitehouse's projected size construct an additional nine acres of mini parks.

Fifteen to thirty parks could be accommodated with this acreage since the size recommendations for these facilities are extremely forgiving (ranging from one quarter of an acre to half-acre sizes). This Plan does not make specific recommendations regarding the location of such parks because local conditions and proposed neighborhood designs will so significantly impact small parks.

***"The question is what kind of park development do we need to have? More and more [park development experts are saying] the less development you have perhaps the better off [the park users] might be."
- Debbie Shafer***

Instead, it is recommended that the Parks Board identify what types of uses would be most beneficial to the residents of proposed or existing neighborhoods through public involvement and additional planning efforts. It is not unusual for mini

parks to be designed to accommodate a specific use. These uses vary dramatically depending on the surrounding residents' needs and may range from playground equipment to neighborhood gardens. It may also be the case that simply providing safe and secure land for public enjoyment in its natural setting



could greatly benefit the community. Strategically located mini parks within greenbelts and other natural areas could provide this type of park setting.

As with larger park sites, a strong park system would locate mini parks in such a way as to provide access to these facilities to every member of the community. The service area for these facilities is only one quarter mile in each direction and relies nearly exclusively on pedestrian access. The service area is strongly impacted by transportation and land use constraints as on-site parking is rarely, if ever provided.

Linkage Systems

Cities frequently advertise not only the individual parks within their system but also the interconnecting trails and sidewalks which provide higher levels of pedestrian access and use. Clearly the belief is that linking smaller groups of parks together with a high-quality trail network creates a system that is greater

"[Even if a park isn't big], having connectivity between smaller spaces makes them seem larger than they really are."
- Dave Terre



Image 12.3: The City of College Station, Texas has successfully linked various park sites by trail systems. In Wolf Pen Creek the trail and meandering creek link numerous smaller parks together with well landscaped and lit hiking and biking paths (top). Along the trail the creek is routed in front of and behind a concrete island holding a large amphitheater facility (left). The park system can easily support thousands of patrons during performances at the amphitheater and also serves many day-to-day recreation needs for City residents.

than the sum of its parts.

For Whitehouse, which in many ways must play a game of catch-up, this linkage concept is even more important.

Although the desire for an improved park system was clearly and strongly expressed by



participants during public involvement, the City does not have a long history of funding park development or effectively managing land dedications.

"Don't think that I don't have a big dream too... I'll dream with anybody as big as they want for the next 15 years... as long as we have some little piece of that big dream that I have a chance of accomplishing in the next five to 10 years... give me a little bit of reality."
– Danny Hogden

Even a small success with several small interlinked parks may be the key to reversing the prevailing attitude that Whitehouse cannot or does not produce quality parks. The

general attitude of participants was that a successful project was vital in order to seed larger efforts in the area of park and recreation development.

Two trail systems have been specifically identified in both the 1995 Plan and throughout public involvement for this project. The first is the Whitehouse Creek trail connecting the Town Center area with Garden View Park in the southern portion of the City. Locating a trail along the creek in the original location may be difficult to accomplish because of past implementation problems. Despite the difficulty, the advantages of this trail corridor are significant and possibly critical to the overall park linkage system's success.

"I'm all for a trail and I think connecting a major park with that trail as a spur it would be a good way to go... but we've missed our opportunity to locate it through the first neighborhood."
– Dale Moran

"Once 346 is done [everything but Cain will be connected, the trail planned in 1995] would bring a connection to all the other schools with sidewalks... we're almost there."
– Suzanne Loudamy

Many potential partners and benefactors exist along the corridor. If properly designed, the system could both benefit from and accentuate the planned Town Center pedestrian design. The City's only retirement home is located adjacent to the creek, as is Cain Elementary.

The opportunity to provide specialized mini parks targeted for retiree enjoyment or educational enrichment throughout the lower trail network would benefit both institutions. By connecting to the existing Rosebrook subdivision park both the



City and Homeowners' Association could benefit from quick and safe pedestrian access to each other's facilities.

Some of the concerns expressed by homeowners living along the trail included the nuisance of parking and bathroom facilities, which would be needed in order to support trail activities. If possible, these concerns could be addressed by providing for parking and bathroom facilities at the Cain Elementary site.

"[In Austin] they had greenbelts between all the apartments, [with lots of recreation amenities], there was always somebody's mother outside watching the kids. Our kids could play all day and we didn't have to worry about them, there were a bunch of people packed together, but it was planned in such a way [that you didn't really notice all of them]."
- Andy Irvine

If School District security concerns could be addressed, the campus has ample parking not utilized after school hours making the solution feasible without expending significant capital funds to construct new facilities. Some citizens also expressed a fear that the trail would

increase crime or lower property values within neighborhoods. While statistics from communities throughout the State contradict these fears, an open dialogue and consensus building process will be necessary to address these concerns. Reversing the trend of low park budgets will also be required in addition to a negotiation process with each stakeholder group.

"I don't think we [the City] have a percentage of our budget that's measurable that goes to parks... I understand that there are many needs but if we're looking at quality of living and attracting the kind of [development that] we want [parks, trails, and open space] have to become a priority."
- Debbie Shafer

Homeowner concerns could also be addressed by considering the trail within the larger system context. City land near the proposed trail's southern termination could be utilized as a future community or neighborhood park site. Additionally, homeowner concerns about parking and traffic could be eased if access to this site was provided through Fowler Road or the Railroad Avenue extension.



Image 12.4: Entertainment oriented businesses and restaurants along Wolf Pen Creek in College Station, Texas have been built in order to benefit from both vehicular and pedestrian traffic from the hike and bike trail. Several restaurants have porch seating taking advantage of the aesthetics of the creek and natural vegetation (top). Other restaurants have designed their sites to take direct advantage of the pedestrian traffic. Sonic built a covered picnic area within a few steps of the trail offering the same service to pedestrians as is provided to customers in cars (right).

The other identified trail corridor follows Blackhawk Creek from Main Street (west of State Highway 110) and terminates south of Garden View Park (east of State Highway 110). This portion of the recommended trail network would take advantage of many

attractive and scenic natural features and provide for the opportunity to coordinate trail development with gateway quality commercial activities. If properly planned, the trail network could not only provide a natural getaway isolating users from their busy lives, but could also include portions of the system tightly integrated with restaurants and shopping destinations (Image 12.4).

It is also important to consider how the trail system will interact with existing roads. In some cases routing trail users through crosswalks at primary intersections may be the best alternative for crossing busy thoroughfares. However, some design elements can make crossing even highly



Image 12.5: Interaction between trails and major thoroughfares is always problematic. One option for mitigating the danger of such crossings is to use design elements such as bulb-outs and pedestrian sanctuary zones within center medians. These design components allow pedestrians to cross part of the road and wait for traffic moving in the opposite direction to clear before proceeding.



used roads easier for pedestrians. These design components include sidewalks, bulb-outs, and pedestrian sanctuary zones within medians (Image 12.5).

***"[Parks and connections] need to be planned right up front, you've got to think ahead."
- Dave Terre***

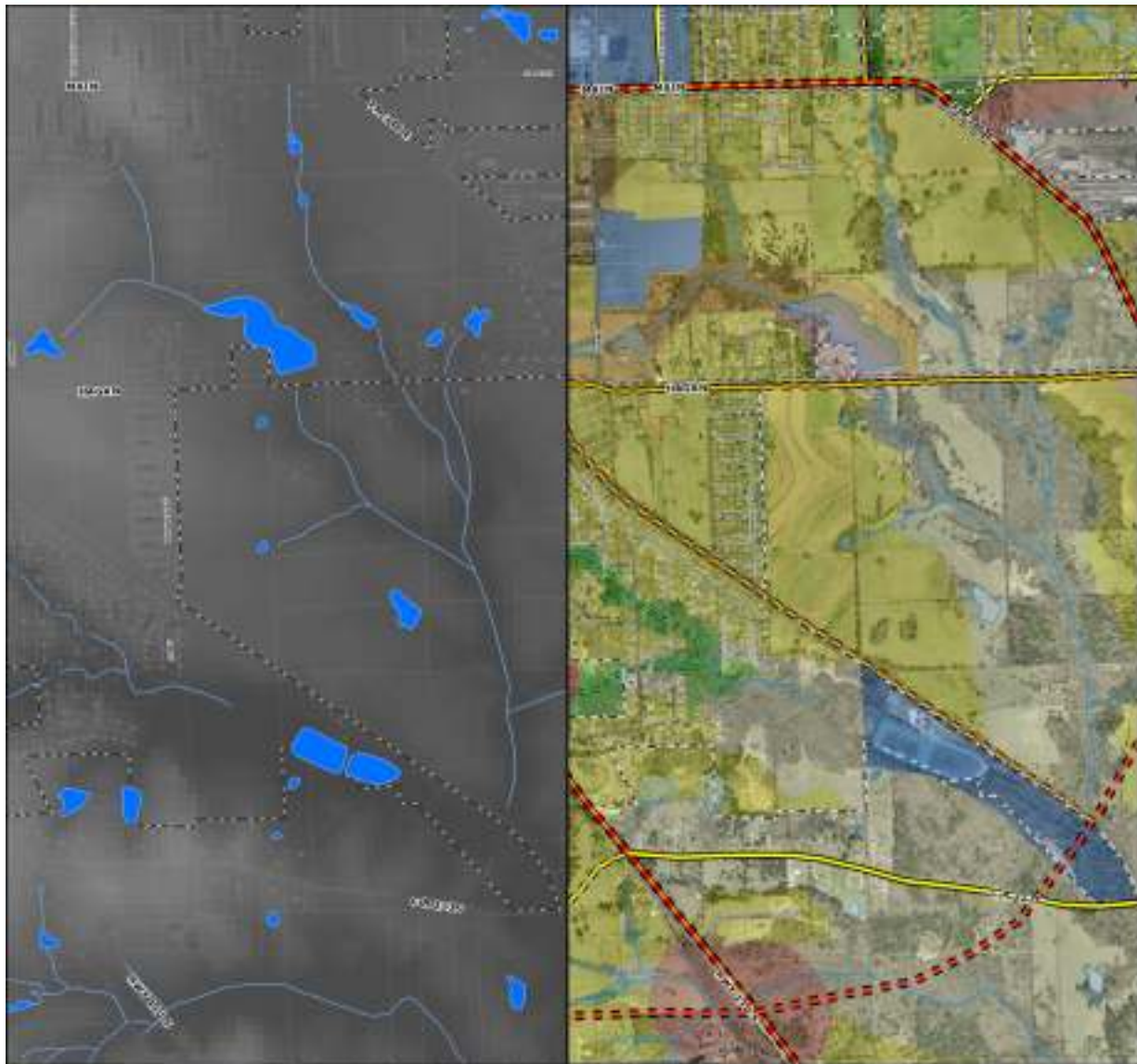
One inherent strength of the Blackhawk Creek Trail option is that in many cases residential development through the corridor has yet to occur. By identifying the area as a future trail corridor, the City can coordinate new residential development with the trail system. Residential projects could not only accommodate the trail, but also provide for new mini and neighborhood parks tightly integrated with both the pedestrian network and residential neighborhoods.

Several other possible trail corridors also exist within Whitehouse. It is recommended that the City identify portions of the 100 year floodplain, which can be utilized to further develop the overall connectivity of the park system through its ongoing public involvement and park planning effort. Whenever



Image 12.6: This trail built in College Station, Texas is constructed on land within the 100 year floodplain. The City worked with landowners to gradually acquire transportation easements or outright ownership of land which would otherwise serve only as a tax burden due to development limitations within flood prone areas.

possible these connections should incorporate the City's scenic ponds and creeks such as those found both north and south of Hagan Road. Many successful trail systems have been built on land which is not suitable for other development including floodplain property near creeks (Image 12.6). Concrete trails do not suffer from damage if occasionally flooded and can draw additional natural value if located near scenic water features.



Map 12.3: Potential Third Trail and Park Network



A very aesthetic creek and lake system runs north/south across Hagan Road (Map 12.3). Much of the land within the system is undeveloped from an urban density standpoint with existing uses such as agriculture and large lot residential. A potential trail network running along this system could connect sidewalks and parks on Main Street (FM 346) in the north with a regional park and the Blackhawk Creek hike and bike trail south of the current City Limits. This trail could also tie in with railroad right-of-way which could be converted for trail use



through the Rails-to-Trails grant program. Aside from the beautiful aesthetics, one of the primary benefits of such a system would be the potential to incorporate planned residential neighborhoods with the trail system from the beginning. In this way, park and trail development could avoid the complications faced by attempts to retrofit such services into existing neighborhoods.

If budget constraints do not permit outright purchase of the land necessary for any proposed trail corridor, the City should pursue easements which would allow for trail construction, access, and maintenance. On-street sidewalks should also be used as temporary connections between incomplete trails or where right-of-way purchases along flood plains and creeks is not feasible.

On-going Funding

City Budget and Private Sector Share

"My concern with having Homeowners' Associations taking care of parks is that [the park could potentially] become their park... [and then they might not want anybody else using it]."
– Debbie Shafer

facilities. While the cost of simply mowing grass on dedicated green spaces is significant, losing the ability to create an interconnected park system due to short-term financial constraints will have serious long-term consequences. At least one Homeowners' Association site located on land rejected as a dedication has been developed as high-quality parkland. A more efficient situation would be similar parks maintained by the City with primary use by the neighborhood which also permits occasional access by other citizens.

A clear preference stated by participants throughout the planning process was that the City should re-evaluate the priority of the park system and provide additional budget funds for the development and maintenance of park

"The quality of life in a City lives and breathes in its parks, if nothing else, if we can create an outstanding park and recreational system then that would change the quality of life in our community by tenfold."
– Mark Sweeney



It is also recommended that the City give serious consideration to the concept of parkland dedication as a required component of residential land development. Many residential developers have made, and continue to make generous contributions to the park system. Unfortunately, without a regulatory structure for these dedications, the City has no way to predict the timing, scale, or quality of the future park system. It is also unfair to some developers who frequently contribute parkland for other neighborhoods to be constructed which do not also dedicate parkland. The parkland dedication ordinance should also contain provisions for the dedication of funds for maintenance of parkland to defray the cost of maintaining and constructing parks within close proximity to the developing neighborhood.

***"New development should pay its way instead of putting the burden exclusively on the existing home owners."
- Mark Sweeney***

Other Government Agencies

***"The transportation enhancement program can fund projects that are related to transportation either by function or impact... that would cover [projects which] connect points providing for pedestrian travel."
- Gary Traylor***

Whitehouse should also pursue funding for park development through other governmental agencies beyond coordination with the Whitehouse Independent School District and City of Tyler. Several employees of the Texas

Parks and Wildlife Department live within the community and participated in public involvement workshops for this Comprehensive Plan. A professor from The University of Texas at Tyler, whose research interests include exercise physiology, also lives within the community and attended several public participation events. These individuals should be involved in order to capitalize on park funding and design experience from within the community. Several grants and State programs would also be available to help further the goals of this Plan.

***"I think that given the City's growth pattern, the 346 widening project, and various other things, [recognizing the traffic situation in Whitehouse, I think] that a project of \$2 million would not be outside the realm of possibilities [for funding through grants]."
- Gary Traylor***



Some agencies not normally associated with park development should also be utilized if possible for this purpose. Federal and State transportation agencies provide programs which can be utilized for trail or sidewalk connections. The Transportation Enhancement Program is one example of this funding type provided through TxDOT.

The application periods for some transportation related grants are only available once every five years. However, even large projects could potentially receive funding. These elements, combined with sidewalk construction related to the widening of Main Street (FM 346), could produce a large impact on the City within a short period of time.

The Rails to Trails program is also a possible avenue for trail development if the railroad right-of-way becomes available. It is not uncommon for cities to utilize park related grants for the construction of the system even with other funding sources in place, such as parkland dedication or general funds budgeting. Public comments indicate that the City should pursue these funds even if they do not cover the entire expense of a particular project. The general sentiment appeared to be that many citizens would prefer to see the City take steps to start the process even if some portions cannot be completed within the immediate timeframe.

"When Gary [of Gary Traylor & Associates] came to us with some grants that might possibly fit into something we need... [we thought] this is exactly what we've been talking about for the Master Plan... it's along the lines of what we're already asking to do... it's not everything that we want to do but we'll take the pieces that we can get when we can get 'em."

– Suzanne Loudamy

Non-Governmental Organizations

The City may also want to consider preservation of open space by private and/or Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO). The Nature Conservancy of Texas is an organization, which according to its mission statement, strives to "preserve the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive." Though more



***"[Regarding the wetlands east of 110,] the best use for that land is what it is being used for right now... [it should] hold the world together and let cows eat grass."
- Mike Peterson***

study is necessary, some wetlands within the community may benefit from the monetary and administrative support provided by such organizations. These types of programs may be most useful in cases where environmental conditions would be

best suited through preservation of the land in its natural state.

Because cities lack the authority to "plan" land as open space, these programs may be utilized to compensate landowners for their development rights. Several locations within the City, including wetlands which act as a direct watershed into the community's drinking water, may qualify for this type of protection.

Parks and Recreation Implementation

Previous Implementation

***"[If we can afford to bring large developments into our infrastructure system] we should also be able to go out and buy some prime park facilities [such as the land on Hagan Road]."
- Mike Adams***

The City of Whitehouse has struggled to extend its parks and recreation system beyond one or two park sites. Many citizens, who are employed as members of the City staff, serve on elected and appointed boards, or are active within the community, have championed the notion of expanding the park system.

Unfortunately, the City has a limited budget for these expenditures because of its residentially heavy tax base.

In addition to this limitation, the City has yet to take advantage of some mechanisms for acquiring parkland beyond simply purchasing the property. Due to some unfortunate recent experiences, the City has also erred on the side of caution when private sector developers have

***"Why not make requirements for green belts and [other park facilities and connections] a part of the Subdivision Regulations?"
- Andy Irvine***



offered to dedicate land for park sites. The concept of parkland dedication as a component of plat approval is another possible funding mechanism yet to be fully considered.

Participants also felt that the City and School District could partner with each other in order to better serve the community in relation to park facilities. While both entities have provided many services to citizens, partnering with each other may be one way to reach the recreation goals of this Plan sooner than would otherwise be possible for each institution individually.

"We should also consider the idea of a joint venture between the City and School District on a major park and recreational facility. That makes a lot of sense for both parties to save money and still provide recreational facilities that neither entity could accomplish alone."
- Mark Sweeney

Parks and Recreation Five-Year Action Agenda

As with previous action agendas within this document, this list should be considered flexible and altered if conditions warrant. Ongoing planning will be required to meet some of the goals expressed in this document since many of the components of a full Parks Plan are beyond the scope of this project. Such ongoing park planning efforts may also result in the need to amend this action agenda.

Due to the nature of park planning, many of the identifiable actions will occur early within this Plan's lifetime. If implemented correctly the tools put in place should begin to work through the City's budget and private sector development.

Year 1:

1. Draft and adopt into the Subdivision Regulations a mechanism which requires the dedication of parkland and funds for park maintenance as a component of plat approval based on the number of homes proposed within the development.



2. Draft and adopt into the Subdivision Regulations a mechanism which requires the dedication of trail right-of-way as identified on the Thoroughfare Plan within this Comprehensive Plan.
3. Budget for consulting services or allocate City staff time for conducting ongoing planning activities related to the specifics of the community's park needs not covered within the scope of this Comprehensive Plan.
4. Conduct ongoing planning activities to create a "Community Needs Assessment" document which would include additional public involvement in order to determine specific park amenity needs as well as finalize alignments for the proposed trail system.
5. Establish criteria, or a "litmus test," to assess the appropriateness of land proposed for dedication as future park or open space sites which would be used in conjunction with the parkland dedication component of the Subdivision Regulations.
6. Pursue any available grants which could be utilized to fund park sites or hike and bike trail development.
7. Familiarize the development community with the goals of this Comprehensive Plan as well as the results of any ongoing park planning in order to provide the best opportunity for coordinated efforts between the public and private sector.
8. Coordinate park, sidewalk, and trail needs with capital expenditures by other City departments through the use of Capital Improvements Programming (CIP).

Year 2:

1. Initiate a cooperative effort with WISD to explore the feasibility of coordinating park maintenance and site development for both minor and major recreational facilities.
2. Budget for and hire additional seasonal staff to handle park maintenance duties on an as needed basis.
3. Budget for the acquisition of land and construction of additional neighborhood parks or a regional park.
4. Initiate an ongoing dialogue with Homeowners' Associations and neighborhood groups regarding their ideas for mini parks and trails within the community.



Year 3:

1. As budget levels increase for maintenance and acquisition purposes, explore the possibilities of the development of a regional park within the community.
2. Through ongoing planning and public involvement, identify high priority natural areas within the community which should be protected through State or NGO funded grants.

Year 4:

1. Prepare and revise GIS and other data sets regarding park and recreation activities for the upcoming minor update to this Comprehensive Plan as it relates to City parks.

Year 5:

1. Undertake a minor update of this Comprehensive Plan to account for changing conditions and implementation successes or failures.

Ongoing Implementation

Some actions should be conducted on a regular and ongoing basis as triggered by certain events. These triggers could include occurrences such as annexations, major development proposals, or unanticipated changes in the East Texas region. Land development through the private sector will also impact ongoing park planning activities.

Trail Easements and Land Acquisition

It is recommended that Whitehouse pursue the acquisition of transportation and access easements for land along creeks which have been identified within this Comprehensive Plan as future hike and bike trail corridors. If possible, the City should purchase this land or acquire it through platting requirements if development is proposed within the corridors. With the recommended trail system

"Big parks or Civic Image dreams are all about timing... your dream has to be big enough so that it motivates you, but still remains realistic to accomplish... it's a phasing thing... we realize there are things we want to accomplish but we're not going to get there overnight."

– Mark Sweeney



phasing should be used in order to acquire and construct noncontiguous portions of the system rather than attempting to complete the entire project all at once. As long as the proposed parks plan is implemented, citizens can be assured that the individual portions of the trail system will eventually connect.

Railroad Right-Of-Way

As with the Transportation Section it is recommended that Whitehouse maintain an open dialogue regarding the ultimate disposition of the railroad right-of-way within the City. The rail right-of-way north of Main Street (FM 346) and south of the wastewater treatment plant should be considered for redevelopment as off-street trails. Funding from sources such as the Rails to Trails Program could be utilized for this purpose should the right-of-way become available.

Park System Standards

The City should constantly monitor how the park system rates compared to national standards. It should be the goal of this and other planning efforts to progress toward meeting and exceeding national standards for both raw acreage and park site distribution within the community.

