

# 7 | *PARKS, OPEN SPACE & RECREATION*

## **Parks, Open Space & Recreation Policies**

The Open Space and Recreation policies are a framework intended to guide the development of new Parks, Rec, and Open Space and a new Trails Masterplans. They are distilled from the Comprehensive Plan's Guiding Principles in order to give a more tailored guideline for developing Lancaster's open space and recreational infrastructure in accordance with the community's goals and vision. These policies, as discussed and vetted with the City Council, Planning and Zoning Commission, and Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee, are as follows:

- POLICY 1:** Continue the strong system of parks and recreational facilities for residents of all ages.
- POLICY 2:** Expand the trail system so all residents can use it for travel, exercise, and enjoyment.
- POLICY 3:** Consider additional recreational investments that appeal to seniors and young professionals.
- POLICY 4:** Incorporate natural assets in the open space system.

## **Introduction**

Due to rapid growth in the DFW region, Lancaster is experiencing tremendous development pressure, with residents and businesses drawn to the Lancaster area because of its rural character and convenient access to downtown Dallas. Parks, recreational infrastructure, and open space are an important part of the high quality of life in Lancaster, and must be well planned if this quality of life is to be maintained as the city grows. The current Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan and Trails Master Plan, summarized in Appendixes 3 and 4 of this document, have served as a guideline for the development of open space and recreational facilities in within Lancaster for the past ten years. Having reached the end of their intended lifespan, these two plans are due for an overhaul to reflect Lancaster's current goals and updated comprehensive plan. The revised master plans should reflect current demographics, new trends in development, and the updated vision for the community expressed in the new Comprehensive Plan. The overall goals outlined in the 2006 Master Plans align well with the Lancaster Comprehensive Plan update. As such, most changes in the news plan would consist primarily of additions and tweaking to the implementation of those goals.

## Updates to Existing Plan Elements

The existing master plans were based on an analysis in 2006 that included demographic projections, facility demand and usage rates, community preferences, and a comprehensive needs assessment based off of those analyses. The new plans should reassess all of those dimensions, as well as complete an inventory to determine which items in the previous master plans have been successfully implemented. Many elements in the Parks plan, such as the senior center and the dog park, have been constructed, while other elements, such as the majority of the recommended trail plan, have not. Some of the items that should be addressed in the Master plans include:

- Reassess the recommended locations for proposed schools and parks. Develop an accompanying phasing strategy that guides the development of new parks and recreational facilities in a way that supports the Comprehensive Plan (i.e. taking into account desired land use changes, density changes, and existing infrastructure).
- Create a plan with a detailed strategy for adding new park acreages to the city to address Lancaster's Park deficits and plan for future growth.
- Amend subdivision ordinances to account for the inclusion of parks, trails, and recreational facilities that support the goals of the Comprehensive Plan as conditions of new development.
- Reassess the recommendations for a proposed gateway feature defining icon along the I-35 Corridor in response to changes made to the Future Land Use Plan (See Chapter 3, Future Land Use and Appendix 2, Figure A2.01), as well as establish other gateways and a gateway hierarchy.
- Include a strong public art strategy or separate Public Art Plan in conjunction with the parks or trails plans to support beautification and community identity.
- Reassess the proposed trail spine system to ensure that routes are in alignment with and support the land use changes recommended in the Land Use Plan. Specific areas that may need tweaking could include routes such as the outer ring trail near Daniieldale Rd, whose path does not currently reach much of the proposed suburban mixed-use center envisioned for the area.
- Stronger linkages between the trails system and the Streetscape Plan to emphasize the development of complete streets and the creation of a multi-modal mobility plan that enhances mobility options and recreational opportunities for residents and visitors.
- Assess Lancaster's status as a biking destination due to its pastoral landscapes, and tweak the implementation plan to support Lancaster as Biking destination in the Metroplex.
- Ensure linkages between the future commuter rail station downtown and the overall trail and mobility plan.
- An updated implementation schedule that is realistic and feasible in response to community resources.

## Marketing and Design

The establishment of a sense of place through design standards is another consideration that should be included in the Master Plan updates. The development of a unified set of design standards including site-furniture, signage, amenities, lighting, etc., can create a strong sense of identity that residents and visitors positively associate with the community.

A focus that is not currently outlined in the master plans that should be considered for inclusion is a specific focus on bicycle networks and related infrastructure. As indicated in community meetings, Lancaster attracts a large number of bicyclers who come to enjoy the rural, pastoral nature of the community, which should be planned for accordingly. In light of that fact, new plans should explore the potential for Lancaster to leverage its infrastructure and natural assets to establish itself as a biking destination within the Metroplex. This could include areas of open space and view-sheds that would need to be preserved, bike facilities in important destinations throughout the community, and strong linkages with complete streets as a component of the streetscape master plan.

Lancaster should also focus on developing a user friendly map showing all completed parks, recreational facilities, open space, and trails throughout the city that is easily available online and regularly updated. This could be linked or combined with a map of transportation infrastructure to enable residents and visitors to easily plan multi-modal trips throughout the community. In conclusion, the city website should provide convenient links to the most updated versions of system wide plans that are coordinated together, (Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan; Trails Master Plan, Streetscape Master Plan, etc.), to inform the community and build excitement around the plans.

## Funding Prioritization and Partnerships

The Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan and Trails Master Plan present a number of recommendations and opportunities to maintain and enhance Lancaster's high quality of life. The 2006 Master Plans contained a number of funding strategies for implementation, including governmental sources such as bonds, sales taxes, and general fund expenditures; governmental grant sources; and private and quasi-private sources. There were also several potential partners identified that could play important roles in the implementation process as well.

In order for the new Master Plans to be effective, these strategies and potential partners should be updated to reflect current conditions and opportunities. Funding the implementation of these plans should remain a high priority for the city moving forward, as a strong open space and recreation system is a key part of maintaining Lancaster's high quality of life, and will be essential to Lancaster's continued competitiveness to maintain and attract residents and businesses.

## Open Space and Recreation Implementation Strategy

The most important part of Lancaster's Parks, Open Space and Recreation Implementation strategy is an update to the 2006 Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan and Trails Master Plan to align them with the new Comprehensive Plan. Some of the elements that should be considered in the plan updates include:

- Update demographic projections and community preferences.
- Revise the recommended locations of various neighborhood parks and schools.
- Designate and implement bike and walking trails; communicate these trails with maps, markers, etc.
- Acquire and improve properties needed to complete networks of trails and open space within a short distance of all neighborhoods.
- Develop a gateway park proposal to create a sense of arrival into the city.
- In partnership with property owners, enhance open spaces and activities in and near the Town Square.
- Reevaluate potential funding sources and partnerships to help implement the new master plans.
- Develop a phasing strategy for park expansion and construction.
- Create a more realistic implementation schedule for the new Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan and Trails Masterplan plans so they effectively implement this comprehensive plan.

Additional items that should be considered in conjunction with the updated master plan include:

- Explore the potential for Lancaster as a biking destination.
- Create a more user friendly interactive map of all facilities and trails within the city.
- Develop a set of design standards and branding to be applied to site furniture, signage, amenities and streetscaping throughout the city.
- Seek partnerships with non-profit organizations to identify and preserve a community-wide network of conservation lands
- Include priority lands for acquisition as part of the City's Capital Improvements Program