

One Vision | One Harlingen

City of Harlingen Parks and Recreation Master Plan



ONE VISION | ONE HARLINGEN
The 2016 Parks and Recreation Master Plan



JANUARY 2016



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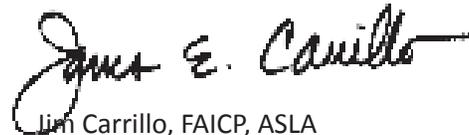
Parks and Recreation Department
City of Harlingen
502 East Tyler
Harlingen, Texas 78550

Reference: The 2016 Harlingen Parks and Recreation Master Plan

Halff Associates Inc. is pleased to submit the 2016 Parks and Recreation Master Plan. This document is the culmination of an extensive planning process involving the elected officials, staff, Parks Advisory Board and most importantly, the citizens of Harlingen. This master plan represents the vision for Harlingen's parks system over the next ten years. The plan is intended to guide the parks system as it responds to growth of Harlingen, but also incorporates flexibility in responding to unique opportunities and new trends in recreation as they arise.

We have enjoyed working with the citizens and staff of the city, and believe that this document will help guide Harlingen as it creates one of the best park systems in the Rio Grande Valley and in South Texas.

Sincerely,
HALFF ASSOCIATES, INC.



Jim Carrillo, FAICP, ASLA
Vice President, Director of Planning

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Parks and Recreation Master Plan would not have been possible without the feedback, input, and support provided by Harlingen’s citizens. We’d like to thank all participants in the planning process, other interested individuals who gave their feedback on this planning effort, and members of city staff. The following individuals are recognized for their significant contributions to the preparation of the 2016 Parks and Recreation Master Plan for Harlingen.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Harlingen’s leaders have long recognized that recreation plays an important role in the quality of life in Harlingen, and that a strong parks system provides for a healthier environment, improves the well being of children and adults, promotes tourism and economic growth, reminds us every day about what is attractive and fun in our city. A great parks system creates a better city for everyone in the city. This document is the culmination of a year-long park planning effort, and is intended to guide staff and elected officials of the city as they decide how best to meet and prioritize the recreation needs of Harlingen over the next ten years.

Since 2010 new housing growth has resulted in significant population growth and today Harlingen’s population exceeds 67,000. Harlingen is projected to grow to a population of over 75,000 by the year 2025, over 90,000 by 2035, and may exceed 100,000 by the year 2045.

The size of the parks system in Harlingen, as summarized below, consists of 24 city-owned parks that contain approximately 563 acres.

Summary of Existing City-Owned Parks	
Total Number of Parks	24
Total System Acreage	562.7
Mini Parks	6 parks totaling 11.3 acres
Neighborhood Parks	5 parks totaling 51.6 acres
Community Parks	7 parks totaling 254.0 acres
Sports Complexes	2 parks totaling 151.4 acres
Nature Parks	2 parks totaling 94.4 acres
Largest Park (besides golf course)	Soccer Complex at 76.9 acres
Smallest Park	Revere Park at 0.6 acres
<i>Source: City of Harlingen</i>	

A needs assessment conducted as part of the planning process included standards based evaluations as well as opportunities for citizens to provide input. Citizens indicated that the following items were their highest concerns.

1. Upgrade facilities at existing parks (20%)
2. Add more trails or places to ride a bicycle (18%)
3. Add a more formal amphitheater for community gatherings or celebrations (9%)
4. Renovate or expand pools in Harlingen (9%)
5. Preserve scenic open spaces that are publicly accessible (8%)

Based on the assessments and input received, the following are the key facility needs in Harlingen.

Very High

- Sand volleyball courts - City currently has none
- Basketball/multi-purpose courts - Very limited supply throughout the city, and these courts provide locations for active sports
- All inclusive/destination play area - Harlingen currently has none, nor are there any within the region around Harlingen
- Trails - Key trail gaps remain, and the western area of the city currently has no trails
- Overall Parkland per capita - the city is currently deficient in this area
- Parkland in the western area of the city - City currently has none
- Quick soccer (Futsal) courts - Futsal is a modified form of soccer played with five players per side on a smaller, sometimes indoor, field or court. There are none currently in the city, and this is a fast growing and very popular version of soccer
- Automated irrigation systems in every park

High

- Multi-purpose flat fields - Additional fields needed to complete Soccer Complex and to provide places for football, lacrosse, cricket, kickball and other flat field activities
- Picnic areas - Needed in all parks, constant demand for facilities
- Pavilions - Needed in all parks, high demand throughout the year
- Splash pads - Only one in the city today. Popular and less expensive way to provide access to water activities for youth
- Practice backstops - To allow for baseball/softball practice as well as soccer/football practice
- Adequate size and quantity of restroom facilities in strategic park locations
- Additional rental facilities, both for large events as well as mid to smaller size for family sized events
- Additional monument signs to identify and help brand Harlingen's parks

Based on the needs assessment, a series of park improvements are recommended for Harlingen. These recommendations address the need for the development of new parks and trails, as well as general improvements to existing parks. These recommendations should be implemented over the general life of this plan, which covers the next 5 to 10 years. The recommended improvements are detailed in Chapter 5, and cover four general categories:

- 1. Improvements to Existing Parks** - Making key improvements to existing parks throughout the city.
- 2. Trail Development** - Developing a citywide connected trails system based on the recommendations of the city's adopted 2010 Trails Master Plan.
- 3. Land Acquisition and New Park Development** - Acquire land for future park development.
- 4. Indoor Facility Needs** - Key indoor facility recommendations.

Funding strategies are outlined in Chapter 6, and will differ for each type of facility. However, the majority of the funding required to address the city's park needs must come from local sources, primarily bond funding and sales tax revenue. While improvements to existing parks and most sidewalks can be built with local funds, other park, open space and trail projects may be able to contend for federal and state funds.

The 2016 Harlingen Parks and Recreation Master Plan is a guide to be used to develop the existing system for future needs over the next five to ten years, with the ultimate life of this plan being ten years. However, during that timeframe changes will occur that impact the recommendations. For example, the community may indicate a special need for a facility not listed in the recommendations, or development of some of the recommendations listed in this plan will occur. A review and update of this plan by city staff should be conducted every year or when a significant change does occur. These updates can be published in short report format and attached to this plan for easy use.



Welcome To
HARLINGEN
Texas

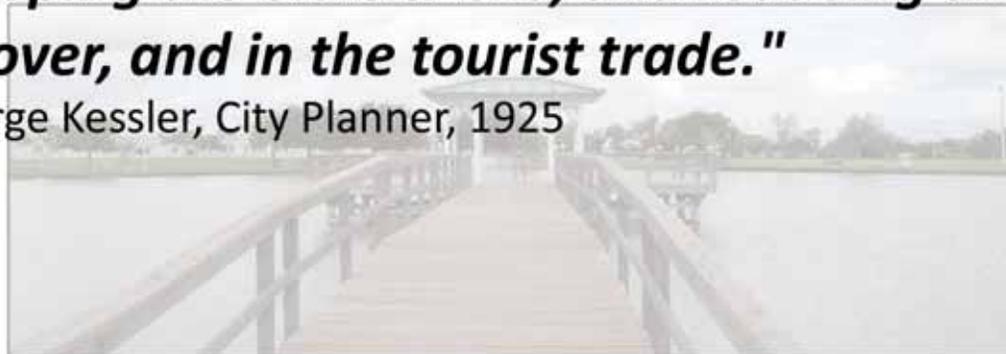
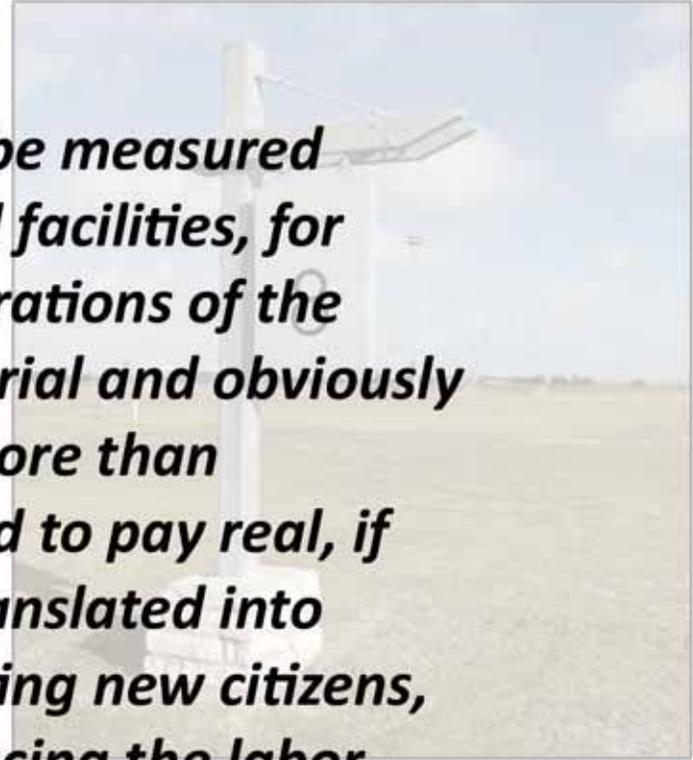
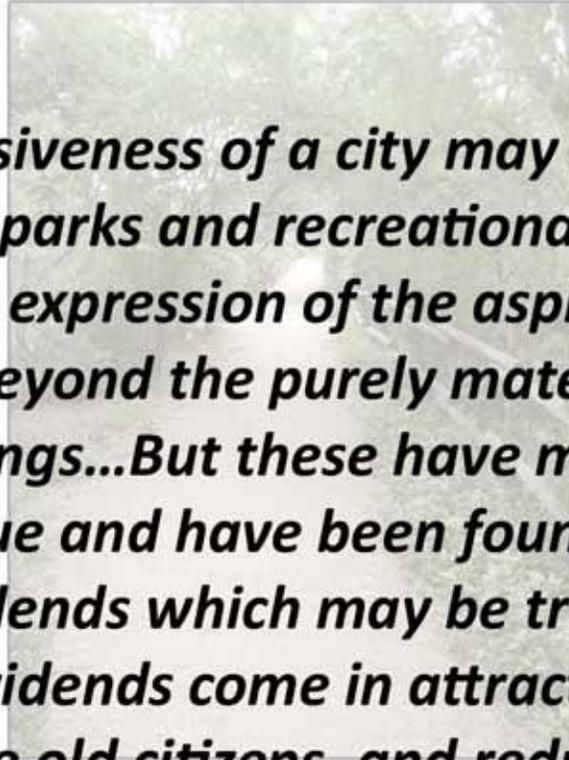
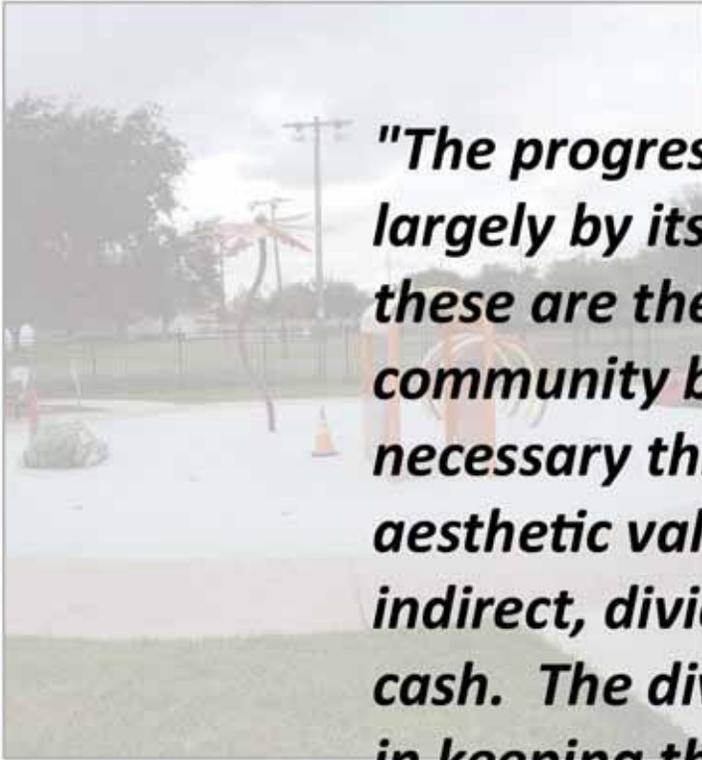


Introduction to Park Planning

Chapter 1

"The progressiveness of a city may be measured largely by its parks and recreational facilities, for these are the expression of the aspirations of the community beyond the purely material and obviously necessary things...But these have more than aesthetic value and have been found to pay real, if indirect, dividends which may be translated into cash. The dividends come in attracting new citizens, in keeping the old citizens, and reducing the labor turnover, and in the tourist trade."

~ George Kessler, City Planner, 1925



THE IMPORTANCE OF PARKS

From its rich culture to its modern recreational amenities, residents of Harlingen should feel proud to be part of a community that treasures and seeks to cultivate the health, welfare and image of the city and its people. We all recognize that the quality of our lives is enhanced by the qualities of the place we live. In turn, that quality of life is reflected in greater economic returns and a great sense of optimism about that place.

Well developed parks and natural areas are often the first places that visitors notice in a community. In fact, parks are one of the most visible elements of a city government at work, and can instill a strong sense of pride in its residents. A great park system lets both citizens and visitors know that the leadership of the city is interested in providing the best for its citizens. Harlingen’s leaders have long recognized that recreation plays an important role in the quality of life in Harlingen, and that a strong parks system provides for a healthier environment, improves the well being of children and adults, promotes tourism and economic growth, reminds us every day about what is attractive and fun in our city. A great parks system creates a better city for everyone in Harlingen.

This master plan assesses what is great about parks and recreation opportunities in Harlingen, and what should be done to fill key needs to make the city an even better place to live. It is an ambitious plan, but one that can be tackled by all who live in Harlingen in readily achievable steps. It is a plan that will help preserve Harlingen as a great place to live, work and play. This document is the culmination of the park planning effort, and is intended to guide staff and elected officials of the city as they decide how best to meet and prioritize the recreation needs of Harlingen over the next ten years.

THE NEED FOR PARK PLANNING

The purpose of this 2016 Parks and Recreation Master Plan is to provide an assessment of Harlingen’s parks and recreation system. The park planning process allows the citizens of Harlingen to determine what their preferred park and recreation priorities should be for the next five to ten years.

A Parks and Recreation Master Plan is exactly what its name indicates. Parks typically refer to the land dedicated to outdoor areas programmed

for recreation. **Recreation** refers to both active and passive recreation activities including ball play, jogging, picnicking, etc. Recreation can be either indoors or outdoors. **Open space** lands can be dedicated for conservation and preservation due to their ecological value, wildlife habitat quality, cultural significance, and functional role to assist with flood management. Strategically dedicating land as open space can contribute significantly to attaining and preserving a unique sense of character in the city environment.

The importance of open space is often overlooked since the concept of open space does not always fit the idea of land programmed for a particular recreational activity that would require regular landscape maintenance. However, the very reason for it not requiring regular attention can be a great asset, offering outdoor enjoyment, visual pleasure and ecological function at a minimum cost.

The 2016 Parks and Recreation Master Plan aims to:

- Point out opportunities and recommend alternatives for improving the park system.
- Look at the potential growth of the city, assess where additional facilities will be needed as the city grows, and assess what types of facilities are most needed.
- Guide city staff in acquiring land to meet future park and open space needs, specifically in terms of community parkland.
- Prioritize key recommendations of the master plan so that the most significant deficiencies are addressed as quickly as feasibly possible.
- Guide city staff and city leaders in determining where and how parks funding should be allocated over the next five to ten years.

Park Master Planning Process

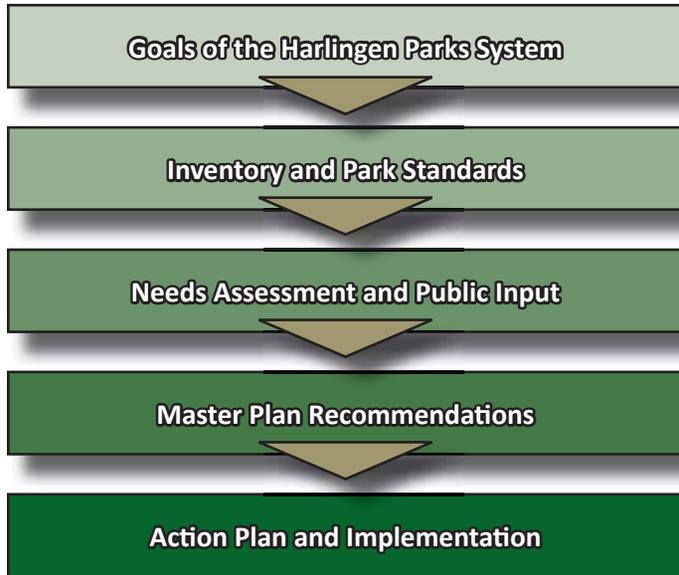
The most important component of the park planning process is receiving input from Harlingen’s citizens, staff and elected officials. This plan should fully embrace the needs, concerns, and wishes of the residents of the city. The plan is divided into sections that address existing facilities and key

needs, then lays out recommendations for each type of park facility and major programs for the city, based on the assessments and input received. The plan divides each recommendation into two categories:

- The first part addresses those actions that are immediate and that should be undertaken to renovate or better utilize existing facilities. It also addresses actions that meet the needs of today’s population.
- The second part of each set of recommendations addresses longer range, visionary actions that can maintain Harlingen’s parks position as one of the best systems in Rio Grande Valley region.

Steps in the Planning Process

The overall park planning process is illustrated by the diagram below.



Master Plan Timeframe

The master plan is formulated to address the 10 year timeframe from 2016 to 2026. Many of the recommendations of the master plan are valid for

a period of more than ten years, and should be reassessed periodically. Per planning requirements issued by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), the master plan should be updated after a five year period, or before if any major developments occur which significantly alter the recreation needs of the city. The following steps are recommended for periodic review of this master plan:

- Periodic reviews by the Harlingen Parks and Recreation Department staff in conjunction with the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, the 4B Community Improvement Board, and the Harlingen City Commission are recommended to review progress and successes.
- Special updates may be required if special needs or occurrences require modifications to the plan.
- In all cases, opportunities for public involvement through citizen meetings, interviews, and/or workshops should be included in any updating process.

Jurisdiction and Recreation Provider

The master plan analyzes the park needs of the city and Harlingen’s Extra Territorial Jurisdiction (ETJ). The recommendations of this plan should be implemented by the City of Harlingen, and is intended to cover the entire city limits, and may also impact areas included in the ETJ. The city limits of Harlingen includes approximately 40 square miles, and the 3.5 mile ETJ adds 130 square miles. The area covered by this plan is shown on the following page.

Harlingen is the primary governmental entity charged with providing recreational facilities for the citizens of Harlingen. Ancillary recreational facilities are provided by Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District on school campuses. The implementation of this plan will be lead by the City of Harlingen and the Parks and Recreation Department. However, everyone in Harlingen has a vested interest in ensuring the parks system in the city becomes one of the best in the region.

- Primary responsibility - Harlingen Parks and Recreation Department, other City of Harlingen departments.

Others that may have a role to play in providing some aspect of parks and recreation in or near Harlingen include:

- All governmental entities, including the City of Harlingen, Cameron County, and Harlingen CISD.
- The business community in Harlingen, including property owners, developers, commercial entities, and others.
- All citizens of Harlingen, no matter which part of the city they live in.
- Nearby residents of Cameron County, since the Harlingen parks system can offer services to non-residents.

The parks master plan follows the general guidelines for local park master plans established by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD). This document will be filed with TPWD and allows the city to better qualify for grant opportunities as they become available.

TRENDS IN THE RECREATION PROFESSION

The parks, open spaces, and recreational offerings of a city play a large role in defining quality of life, as well as a city's identity and image. Relative to the mobile nature of society today, especially in Texas, these offerings play a large role in determining where people choose to reside and consequently affects population and economic growth. It is therefore important to understand regional and national trends related to parks and recreation facilities. Several of the most prevalent trends in the recreation profession are discussed below. These are expected to carry forward into the near future and be relevant for the lifespan of this master plan.

The rate of change in the world and the United States is accelerating, and many of these trends are having a direct impact on recreation. These trends include:

- We have many more leisure activity choices. Greatly increased at-home leisure opportunities are available today, such as hundreds of channels on television, sophisticated game consoles, smart phones, and the internet.

- Safety is a great concern to parents. Many parents no longer allow their children to go to area parks unattended. In many places the use of neighborhood parks has gone down.
- We live in an era of instant gratification. We expect to have high quality recreation, and to be given activities that we will like. Cities must be willing to provide a broader menu of recreation activities, but must re-evaluate those activities if they become too costly.
- Through the media and internet, we are exposed to the best from around the world. Because of this, we expect our facilities and activities to be of the highest quality possible.
- Concern over the health of our population is rapidly growing. Obesity and diabetes are now recognized as nationwide problems. Funding to reduce obesity and diabetes rates by increasing outdoor activities may be more readily available in the future. It may also be a source of grants for parks and recreation programs and facilities.
- New revenue sources for public funding are difficult to come by. The federal surpluses briefly experienced at the turn of the century are now a thing of the past, and deficit spending is probable for the next decade. As a result, relatively little help can be expected from the federal and state governments, and even popular grant programs such as enhancement funds for trails and beautification are not always available.
- "Play for All" facilities and programs that address special needs children, youth and adults are receiving significant attention today. This trends focuses on creating facilities that level the playing field for all participants, regardless of physical ability.

Outdoor Recreation Trends

- One of the most important and impacting trends in parks and recreation today is the increased demand for passive recreation activities and facilities. Passive recreation, as compared to active recreation, includes activities such as walking and jogging on trails,

picnicking, enjoying nature, and bird watching. It focuses on individual recreation rather than organized high-intensity pastimes like team athletics (which has long been the focus of parks and recreation departments nationwide). People look for opportunities to use parks



and open space on their own time and in their own way.

- Across Texas, the provision of trails is the top priority for citizens. Numerous surveys, public meetings, questionnaires, and in-person interviews have shown that people, on average, place the

importance of trails above the provision of any other single type of recreation amenity or facility. Many factors contribute to this, including the demand for passive recreation (as discussed above), greater focus on health, rising transportation costs, and increasing funding opportunities for bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

- Related to the previous two trends, the protection of and access to open space and natural areas is growing in popularity across the nation. As people are increasingly using trails, they generally prefer to use trails that are located in scenic areas in order to enjoy being outdoors.
- While passive recreation is in greater demand, active recreation activities still play a large role in city parks and recreation systems. One major trend over the last few years has been changing participation rates in various city-sponsored league sports. Examples of these include dramatically increased participation in youth soccer, and the emergence of new league sports such as adult soccer, kickball, and youth lacrosse.

Indoor Recreation Trends

- There is a movement away from providing multiple smaller recreation centers to providing a single large center that is within a 10 to 15 minute travel time of its users. This trend responds to increased diversity of programming that can be provided at these larger centers,

while also being more convenient for families to recreate together. These types of centers also provide increased staff efficiency.

- There is a trend of combining separate senior activity areas within a large community center. Such an area with a distinct entrance separate from the main center entrance gives the desired autonomy of seniors while providing convenient access to the various opportunities in a recreation center including indoor walking track, warm water exercising, and adequately sized fitness areas.
- Because of the increase in the cost of operating public facilities, many cities today are seeking a higher fee structure to help offset costs. Observation reveals a range from a 50 to 60% operational cost recapture rate all the way to a 100% recapture rate in some cities in Texas.
- University students today have elaborate recreation and aquatic facilities at their disposal. New graduates are leaving their universities with expectations for cities to provide comparable facilities. Quality of life is an extremely important component of a new graduate's job search and residence decision.



Environment and Recreation Trends

- As cities and towns continue to grow and expand, citizens are becoming increasingly aware of the diminishing amounts of open space and natural areas in and around their communities. Similarly, this increased awareness parallels an increased interest in preserving open spaces, rural landscapes, and natural areas along creeks, lakes, wooded areas, prairies, and other environmentally and culturally significant locations.
- Related to this increased interest in the preservation of open spaces and natural areas is an increased interest among citizens to consider alternative development strategies within their communities. This is

in order to preserve and provide access to natural areas, decrease traffic congestion, encourage walking and bicycling, enhance property values, and increase recreation opportunities within their community. Alternative development strategies often considered include mixed-use development, new urbanism, and conservation developments.

- The attributes of a community play a large role in attracting (or detracting) people to a city or region. Research shows that the quality of a city's environment (its climate, park space, trails, and natural resources) is among the most significant factors in attracting new residents. As such, high-quality, high-quantity parks and open space systems can contribute to the future growth of Harlingen.

Baby Boomer Trends

It is projected that there are 77 million Americans born between the years of 1946 and 1964. The Baby Boomer generation comprises one-third of the total U.S. population. With such a significant portion of the population entering into the retirement age, they are redefining what it means to grow old. Many Baby Boomers are opting not to retire at a traditional retirement age. Because of their dedication to hard work and youthfulness, this population is expected to stay in the work force longer because they take pleasure in being challenged and engaged. According to *Packaged Facts*, a demographic marketing research firm, trends that are beginning to take off because of the Baby Boomers include:

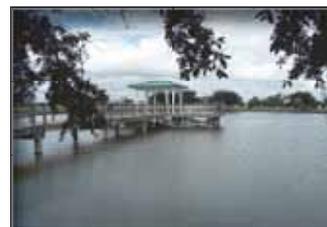
- Prevention-centered health care to keep aging bodies free from disease.
- Anti-aging products and services that will keep mature adults looking as young as they view themselves to be.
- Media and internet technology to facilitate family and social ties, recreation and lifelong learning.
- Innovation in housing that allows homeowners to age in place.
- Increasing entrepreneurial activity among those who have retired, along with flexible work schedules that allow for equal work and leisure time.
- Growing diversity in travel and leisure options, especially with regard to volunteer and eco-friendly opportunities.

VALUE & BENEFITS OF PARKS AND RECREATION

Developing an excellent park and recreation system demonstrates a local government's commitment to offer a high quality of life for its residents. A superior park and recreation system increases the quality of life in a community because of the many benefits it offers. Parks are the single most visible positive expression of a city government at work.

Opportunities for Relaxation and Rejuvenation

So many people face increased challenges every day, whether it is from their job, their family life, financial obligations, or any other combination of things. People come to parks to relieve some of their daily stress. Whether



it involves kicking a soccer ball, watching their children play on the swings, or fishing in creeks and ponds, the idea of restoration is that people feel better after they leave a park than when they first arrived. There are some elements of the natural environment that can increase the likelihood of restoration.

- Parks and recreation allow for people to reflect and discover what is on their mind. This can come from fishing, listening to birds, watching a water fountain, enjoying the scenery, or countless other natural occurrences. Placing benches or bridges where people can stop to notice nature increases the opportunities for restoration.
- Parks need to have inviting things to allow the mind to wander. Japanese gardens offer outstanding examples of how small spaces can achieve this. They position viewpoints so the entire garden cannot be seen at once, they have circuitous pathways to make the area seem larger, or they have vegetation that divides larger spaces.
- By providing a slight sense of enclosure, the users of the park feel as if they are somewhere else, away from life's distractions. This can be achieved by having a tree canopy or planting vegetation along building sides to screen them.

Opportunities for Community Involvement

Parks and recreation offer opportunities for citizens to become involved in the community. There are many ways in which citizens can be involved in

the community through parks and recreation. Examples include:

- Having an Adopt-A-Park or Friends of Our Park program lets residents volunteer to help maintain one specific park in their neighborhood.
- Allowing residents to be instructors for a recreation program gives them the opportunity to share and teach their skills to other members of the community.
- Organizing work day projects to install a playground or plant new trees lets residents feel a sense of ownership in the park they helped build.

By providing opportunities for residents to become involved in the community, parks and recreation also provides opportunities for residents to socialize and meet their neighbors.



Benefits to At-Risk Youth and Teens

One major benefit of parks and recreation is the impact it can have on at-risk youth. Teenagers are the hardest market to reach; when there is a lack of activities for them, some may engage in juvenile delinquency. By providing activities and recreation programming for this segment of the population, a city is providing a safe place for the youth to go and a usually supervised environment for them to be in.

Tourism Impacts of Parks and Recreation

People visit a city for the attractions that are offered. Several attractions in a community include parks and recreational facilities, as well as festivals, concerts and events that take place in those facilities. In essence, people often visit a city because of the Parks and Recreation Department. For example:



- While visiting New York City, people want to go to Central Park in addition to other

historical sites and monuments.

- Millennium Park in Chicago is rapidly becoming the primary tourist attraction in that city.
- Harlingen is turn known as a popular birding destination, with Hugh Ramsey Nature Park and the Thicket being key attractions. Visitors also come to use trails along the Arroyo Colorado, or to see the Iwo Jima monument at the Harlingen Military Academy.

Parks and recreation are also good for a community's economy because of the impact it can have on other businesses. For example hotels often charge more for a room if it overlooks a park, lake, ocean, garden or open space as opposed to a roof top or parking lot. By charging more, the hotel/motel tax that the city receives is higher. Other business impacts include the operations that people start in conjunction with a park or trail, or restaurants and shopping the benefit from people coming to a city for a tournament such as those held at the Soccer Complex and the Tom Wilson Sports Complex.

Environmental Benefits of Parks

Parks and recreation offer several environmental benefits to a community. Parkland, open space, greenbelts and trails all contribute to ensuring that a community is green and not overrun with concrete and construction. For one, parks and open space can control storm water runoff and reduce the likelihood of flooding. Rain water that falls onto impervious surfaces can be slowed down by planting trees which impede the fall rate.

Parks, open space and trees also contribute to cleaner air in a community. Trees can absorb air pollutants that would otherwise increase sulfur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, and carbon monoxide in the atmosphere.

Parks and open spaces protect wildlife habitat as well. Habitats of endangered species and areas specific to migratory patterns are often protected and designated as parkland or open space. By preserving these lands, a community is helping the survival of these species.

Parks and open space contribute to the preservation of land in general as

well. The parks and recreation department within a community ensure that all the land is not developed. It is important to have green space and places of nature within a city. Parks and greenbelts are the most significantly preserved open spaces in a community.

Personal Health Benefits of Parks and Recreation



Parks and recreation at its most basic function offer places for exercise. With heart disease, diabetes, and

child obesity rising to staggering numbers, we all need to be more physically active. Parks and recreation gives us the opportunities to be physical. Whether it is jogging along a trail, playing on a softball league, taking a fitness class, or swimming at the pool, the most common places for exercise are in the parks and through our recreation programs.

Play is critical for child development. Organized sports, playing on a playground, and even unstructured activities such as tag or hide-and-seek will help children develop muscle strength, coordination, cognitive thinking and reasoning, and develop language skills. Also, play teaches children how to interact with one another. The places where children play are again at a community's parks and recreational facilities.

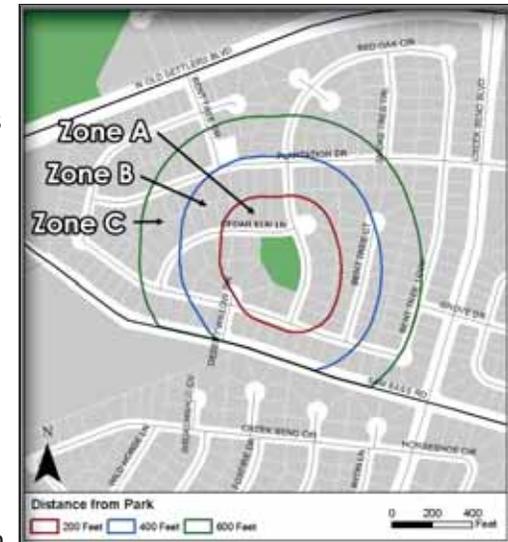
Parks and recreation have been shown to have psychological benefits as well. Physical exercise helps develop new nerve cells which increase a person's capacity for learning. Being in nature and exercising have both been shown to reduce feelings of stress,

depression and anxiety. Parks and nature conjure a sense of relaxation. A person does not have to be among nature for extended periods of time to experience those feelings. Just driving through a park or looking at green space through a window of a building has been shown to be enough to relax the mind.

The Economic Benefits of Parks and Recreation Are Endless

In the parks and recreation profession, there has been a movement in the past few decades to prove that parkland has a direct impact on the property values of homes in a community. The Proximity Principle, developed by Dr. John Crompton of Texas A&M University, is a theory that people are willing to pay more for their home when it is close to a park or green space.

- The Proximity Principle divides houses into different zones and the zones closest to a park have the highest value. People living in Zone A pay the most for their home, people living in Zone B pay less than Zone A but more than Zone C, and people living in Zone C pay the least (image below).



- If people pay more for their property, then this results in higher property taxes being paid to the city.

HEALTHY HARLINGEN

Harlingen has endorsed and created a new "Healthy Harlingen" initiative which stemmed from the Mayor's Wellness Council.

The goal of Healthy Harlingen is to become a leader in the promotion of health and wellness in the community.

The Mayor's Wellness Council will serve as a liaison between community groups focused on the common goal of overall health and wellness. They will assist members of the community in raising their overall fitness levels, while developing a lifestyle which will sustain a high quality of life.



Goals describe the desired outcome for a plan. It is different from a vision in that it speaks directly about a component of the overall system.

Objectives are identified statements or policies that work toward the goal. It is more specific than a goal, and addresses particular issues related to the elements to achieve the desired goal.

Actions include specific strategies or steps to take in order to reach a specified objective. Action items are specific enough to include a recommended timeframe for implementation, other agencies or entities to partner with, and often a potential cost.

Benchmarks are target measures which the objectives and actions are working toward. It measures progress toward achieving the goal over time, and are ways to measure progress of plan implementation.

- Also, park maintenance typically costs much less for a city than providing services to the additional homes that would have otherwise been built on the site. For example, if ten additional houses were built on a piece of land instead of a park, it would cost the city more money each year to provide water, sewer, trash service, police and fire protection, and schools for the ten houses than it would to maintain a park.
- In a study done by the Trust for Public Lands for the Philadelphia Parks Alliance in 2008, it was calculated that parks in Philadelphia generate \$18 million in added property tax revenue, \$689 million in increased equity for homeowners near parks, \$16 million in municipal cost savings, \$23 million in city revenue, and \$1.1 billion in cost savings for citizens.

WHY PLAN FOR PARKS NOW?

It is an opportune time to plan for the continued growth of Harlingen. Parks and recreation are necessary components of a city's infrastructure, and contribute first hand to the quality of life offered in a city. Harlingen currently has an excellent system of city neighborhood parks, larger community parks, and the opportunities for an all inclusive trails system. This plan outlines the steps necessary for Harlingen to address facility updates, provide centrally located and accessible neighborhood parks, enhance recreational opportunities at community parks, and continue to build a citywide network of trails.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goals and objectives for a plan such as this create the foundation for guiding future decisions and development. They are intended to build upon the goals established by other planning efforts conducted by the city. Goals are an important part of the planning process in that they provide the underlying philosophical framework for decisions and also guide decision makers on issues. The goals expressed in this master plan reflect the desires of the citizens, elected and appointed officials, and the staff of Harlingen.

These goals are based on the input received from the public input meetings, the citizen survey, during stakeholder interviews, and meetings with the Parks and Recreation Department, and city management staff.

Parks and Recreation Department Mission Statement

The mission of Harlingen Parks and Recreation is to provide a wide range of recreational and educational opportunities; creating and sustaining beautiful and lively parks; and promoting a healthy and natural environment for citizens of Harlingen and visitors and conserve them for future generations. The Parks and Recreation Department “Creates Community Through Parks and People.

Goals & Objectives for Harlingen’s Parks

Goal: Harlingen will have an exceptional system of parks, trails and indoor recreation facilities that promotes the city’s reputation as an excellent place to live and visit.

Objective 1: Focus on enhancing and upgrading existing parks throughout the city. Assessment by the Parks and Recreation Department in 2013 identified 25 specific needs within existing parks in all parts of Harlingen. These ranged from minor playground improvements to the renovation of pavilions and restrooms.

Objective 2: Continue to develop a citywide network of trails for both recreation and transportation. The 2010 Trails Master Plan identified high priority trail corridors that could eventually create a citywide trail system. The city should aggressively pursue park and trail grants to complete these corridors.

Objective 3: Continue to expand facilities that create economic development and tourism opportunities. Special park and open space facilities go beyond meeting local recreation needs, but instead attract outside visitation and tourism. These include the World Birding Center facilities at Hugh Ramsey Nature Park, a nature center building, the Harlingen Soccer Complex and improvements to the baseball and softball fields at the Wilson Sports Complex.

Objective 4: Pursue park opportunities for growing areas of the city that currently are underserved. Growth areas of the city, particularly in West Harlingen, the northwest area of the city, and neighborhoods north and south of North Loop 499, do not have access to nearby parks. Three

strategies are recommended: a) work with new development to create parks; b) pursue sharing of school sites with Harlingen CISD facilities in each of these areas; and c) where available, consider acquiring land for long term community park development for the area.

Objective 5: Pursue opportunities for indoor recreation facilities. The city currently has no dedicated indoor recreation centers. These facilities are a fast growing component of recreation in many cities, offering fitness programs and indoor gym space for basketball, volleyball, and indoor soccer. They typically become the focus of recreation programming in the entire city. As a longer term aspirational goal, Harlingen should consider adding indoor recreation center facilities.

Objective 6: Pursue opportunities for all inclusive play facilities. The city currently has no real all inclusive playground facility. The City of Harlingen understands that designing a truly inclusive playground goes far beyond just meeting the basic requirements of compliance with the ADA. In order for a playground to be inclusive in the true sense of the word, it needs to be designed so that all children, regardless of their level of gross motor ability or developmental level, can access most, if not all, of the levels of play equipment. An inclusive play environment is one that is not only accessible, but encourages and enables children of ALL abilities to engage with one another.





Harlingen Today

Chapter 2

"Parks are a good measure of local pride and integral to our sense of well-being. A run-down park that no one wants to visit reflects badly on the local area. Everyone should have a nearby park they can be proud of with plenty of opportunities for fun, exercise and the enjoyment of beautiful things."

~ Dame Liz Forgan, English Journalist



WHY HARLINGEN'S CHARACTER IS IMPORTANT

The 2016 Parks Master Plan should build upon the best features of Harlingen. It should enhance what Harlingen is, how it came to be, and what the citizens of Harlingen want of their city, rather than trying to make it something that it is not. Understanding the context of the city is an important part of the park planning process.

Both the physical and demographic makeup of the city help determine the current and future park needs of its citizens. This chapter summarizes the current context of Harlingen in the year 2016, including the history of Harlingen, the demographics and population of the citizens of the community, and the physical characteristics of the city.

The History of Harlingen

The City of Harlingen was officially established on April 15, 1910 with the swearing-in of Mayor Ike B. McFarland and Commissioners John D. Hill and Homer N. Morrow. However, prior to the formal establishment of the city, Harlingen was settled by pioneer Lon C. Hill who, in 1902, purchased a 13,837 acre track where Harlingen is approximately located.

Initially known as "Six-Shooter Junction" Harlingen was a settlement of Texas Rangers and Border Patrolmen until Hill realized the potential of the Arroyo Colorado. It didn't take long for others to recognize the strategic location of Harlingen. The construction of the first irrigation canal in the Rio Grande Valley brought opportunity and growth to Harlingen. The town's center – the intersection of Van Buren and First Streets – was home to a hotel, two general stores, a hardware/drug store, a barbershop, four saloons, and the Hill house. The Texas Rangers moved their headquarters along the railroad with the job of making the Valley a safe place to live.



Historic photos source: City of Harlingen, History of Harlingen, www.myharlingen.us/default.aspx?name=pi.history

When Harlingen incorporated in 1910, the town had a population of 1,126. During the 1920s, Harlingen had become a commercial hub for the Valley and was home to approximately 12,124 people by 1930. Due to the construction of irrigation canals, agriculture thrived in the fertile lands of Harlingen. Not only was crop production growing, but agriculture processing and distribution industries grew as well. With a booming economy, families began moving to Harlingen, bringing with them more merchants and businesses as the city continued to grow.

In May 1941, the War Department developed a military airfield on 960 acres in Harlingen and established the Harlingen Army Gunnery School, helping pull Harlingen out of a lingering depression and resulting in immense population growth for the city. Population jumped to 13,306 in 1940 and 41,207 in 1960. However, the Air Force Base closed in 1962 hurting Harlingen's economy, and the population fell to approximately 33,503 by 1970.

While industry and population levels fluctuated after World War II, many of Harlingen's modern industries have historical roots. The former air field that opened in 1941 now serves as the Valley International Airport. The Valley Baptist Center that was established in 1925 remains one of the most important health centers in the area. Several other health services are offered in Harlingen today, including the nationally recognized Harlingen Medical Center and a Ronald McDonald House.

Tourism became an important economy, and by the late 1980s it was the region's second-ranked economy behind citrus production. The continued growth of trade, manufacturing, and service industries has broadened the economic base. Through the latter part of the 20th century, Harlingen continued to attract residents, colleges, and medical centers, proving itself

as a major economic center of the Valley. In 2010, the reported population by the US Census Bureau was 64,849 and in 2013 was estimated at 65,665.

Harlingen continues to be strategically located with regards to international and national transportation routes. What began as a small town off a branch of the Corpus Christi - Brownsville railroad line, is now at the intersection of IH 69 and IH 2. Since the beginning, Harlingen's strategic location has served as an important juncture between the north, south and western routes.

Regional Context

Cities are influenced and shaped by regional physical, economic, and social forces. Therefore it is important to recognize its position in the region. This helps cities benefit from regional opportunities. Regional organizations strive to create a more comprehensive and cooperative planning process, leading to more effective actions and outcomes. These regional organizations provide a variety of planning tools and data to help cities and the region plan for growth more effectively.

Located approximately 25 miles northwest of Brownsville and 35 miles east of McAllen, Harlingen is located near the intersection of US Interstate 2 and US Interstate 69E, two major transportation routes for international and national trade. Furthermore, 8 miles south of Harlingen is the Los Indios Free Trade Bridge, a border crossing into Mexico. The Valley region includes four counties: Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, and Willacy. Cameron County is the southernmost county in Texas.



City of Harlingen within Cameron County

POPULATION TRENDS AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Understanding the current and future size and characteristics of the population to be served is a key part of the park planning process. Establishing a base population for today is the foundation from which the projection of population growth extends and influences the demand and needs for future parks and recreational facilities.

This section examines historical growth in Harlingen, reviews recent growth trends since 2000, and establishes a potential population projection range for this planning analysis. The U.S. Census Bureau is the primary source for population estimates used by government entities across the nation. Not only does the U.S. Census Bureau estimate the population, but they also collect detailed characteristics of population that often have planning implications.

However, the U.S. Census does not provide future population projections. There are several sources that project population for the city and county, which were used to evaluate the projected population growth of Harlingen.

Overall, resources for this evaluation include the U.S. Census Bureau, the Texas State Data Center (TXSDC), and the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB).

Historical Growth

During the 1920s, new settlers came to the Rio Grande Valley and Harlingen experienced considerable growth. Peak growth occurred during the 1940s and 1950s when the US Military opened facilities in the city during WWII. During this period, the population of Harlingen grew from 13,306 in 1940 to 23,229 in 1950, and to 41,207 in 1960.

In 1962, Harlingen Air Force Base closed, and Harlingen lost a significant population base. The base closure forced Harlingen to identify new ways to attract growth and development to its community.

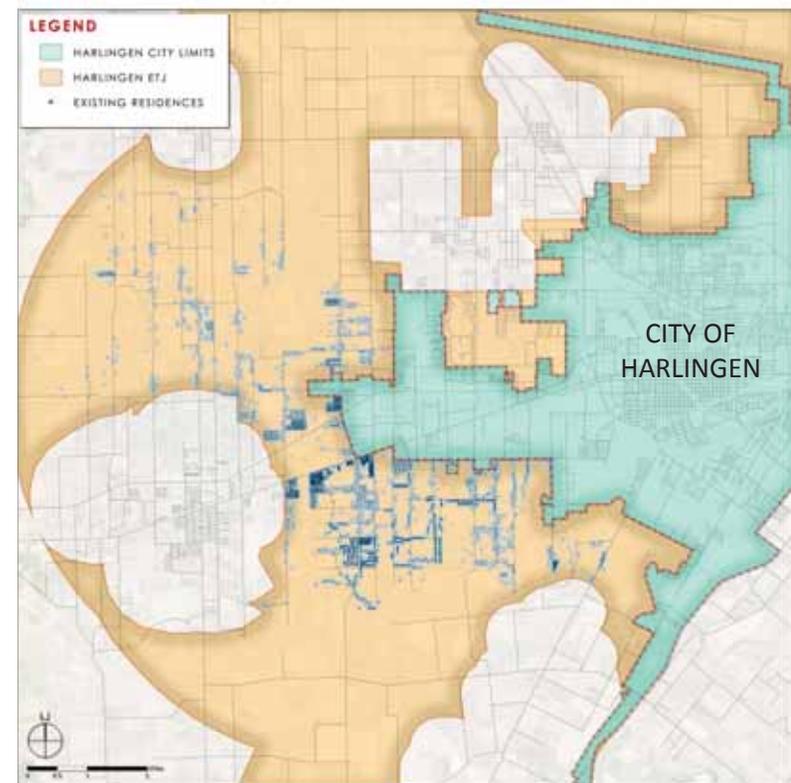
Since 1970, the city has continued to grow. Between 2000 and 2010, Harlingen grew at an average rate of 1%. Since 2010 new housing growth has resulted in a population growth of 2.3% by the beginning of 2013, and

with the annexation of new areas in 2012, Harlingen's population in 2014 is believed to have exceeded 67,000.

Harlingen's Effective Population

Significant growth has also occurred in areas near but outside of the city limits of Harlingen. Within the city's current 3.5 mile ETJ, a tally of existing residences indicates almost 3,000 residential units surrounding the city (shown on the map on this page). At an average household size of 3.04 persons per residence, those 3,000 homes indicate a potential current population of 9,000+ living within Harlingen's ETJ. If one considers the populations of smaller incorporated cities adjacent to Harlingen (including Palmview, Combes, Primera, Rangerville and Los Indios), another

Existing Residences within Harlingen's West ETJ



10,000+ area residents actively participate in and contribute to Harlingen's economy and actively use park and recreation facilities in the city.

Future Population Growth

Harlingen is projected to grow to a population of over 75,000 by the year 2025, and over 90,000 by 2035. The population will exceed 100,000 by the year 2045.

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

The demographic information illustrated below represents the characteristics of the population, households and workforce for the entire study area, which includes the City of Harlingen, its surrounding ETJ and smaller cities. Because the US Census Bureau does not have this detailed information for the entire study area, this data was obtained from ESRI Demographics, which prepares population and demographic estimates for user-defined geographic areas.

Age and Gender Characteristics

Evaluating the population by age helps the city understand what the needs and lifestyles are of the residents of the city. Generally, the Harlingen population is dominated by Generation X (mid 20s to mid 50s) as well as the older portion of Generation Y (teens to mid 20s) and younger portion of the Baby Boomer generation. This population, which is roughly between the ages of 20 and 64, accounts for over half of the population in Harlingen. The largest population segment is between the ages of 25 and 34, accounting for 12.5% of the population.

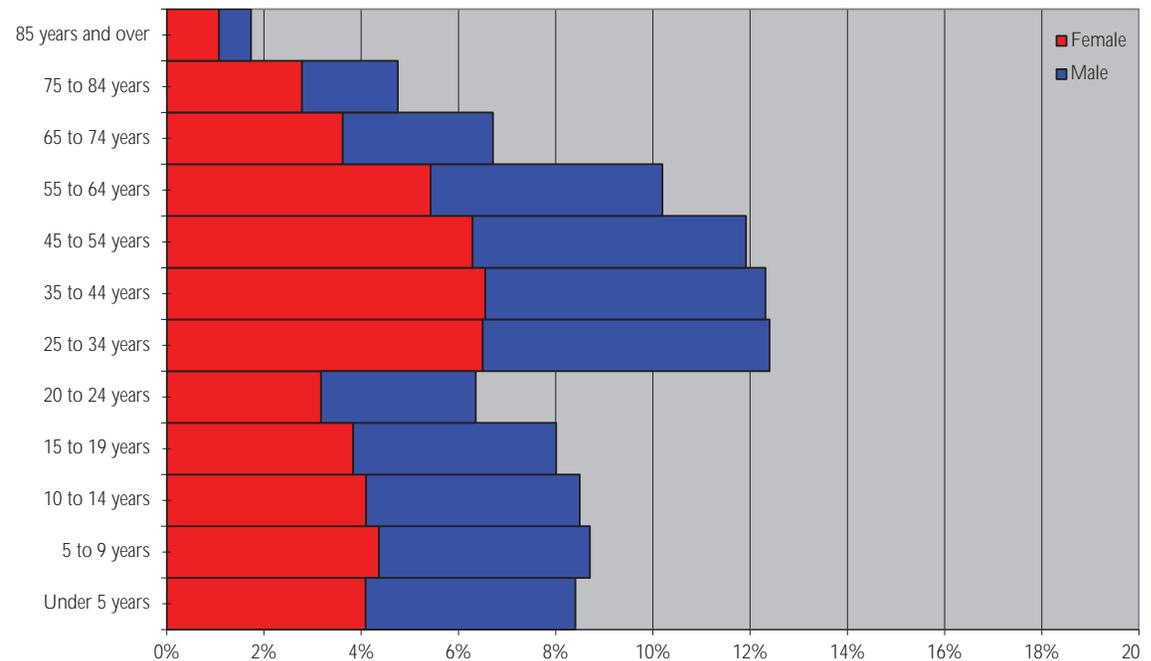
Compared to other cities in the region, Harlingen has a relatively young population. The median age in 2010 of 32.8 years is slightly higher than other cities in the region but significantly younger than the State of Texas and the United States as a whole.

37.3% of the city’s population in 2010 was between the ages of birth and 19 years, and almost two-thirds of the population is younger than 40. Over 13% of the population is over 65, and the city must consider the needs of senior residents as well.

	1990	2000	2010	2013
Age 0-19	35.5%	34.4%	33.6%	32.7%
Age 20-39	28.1%	26.2%	25.1%	25.5%
Age 40-64	22.3%	24.9%	28.1%	28.2%
Age 65+	14.1%	14.5%	13.2%	13.6%

Note: Data for incorporated area as well as extraterritorial jurisdiction

Source: ESRI Demographics, Comparison Profile, Age by Sex Profile, Harlingen City & ETJ



Racial and Ethnic Characteristics

The Census estimates over the last 30 years indicate that Harlingen’s residents are primarily Hispanic . Harlingen’s racial and ethnic make up is similar to other communities in the Valley region, being predominantly white and Hispanic, with very low African American or Asian races, and a significant portion of the population not identifying with one of the specified races on the Census survey (Other), or identifying with more than one race.

According to the U.S. Census demographic categories, a person of Hispanic or Latino heritage can be of any race. Therefore, in the table to the right, the percentages add up to more than 100%.

Population by Race and Ethnicity Trends: City of Harlingen & ETJ, 1990-2013					
		1990	2000	2010	2013
Racial Distribution	% White	79.6%	79.2%	87.4%	86.4%
	% Black	0.6%	0.8%	0.8%	1.4%
	% American Indian	0.2%	0.5%	0.5%	0.6%
	% Asian	0.3%	0.7%	1.0%	1.1%
	% Pacific Islander	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	% Other	17.7%	16.4%	8.4%	8.7%
	% Multiple Races	1.4%	2.4%	1.7%	1.8%
Hispanic or Latino		69.6%	73.3%	80.1%	81.2%
<i>Note: Data for incorporated area as well as extraterritorial jurisdiction</i>					

Source: ESRI Demographics, 1990-2000 Comparison Profile, Harlingen City & ETJ; ESRI Demographics, Age by Sex by Race Profile, Harlingen City & ETJ, 2010 & 2013

Educational Attainment

When the educational attainment of Harlingen is compared to Cameron County, the Harlingen population is somewhat more educated than the overall county. When compared to the State of Texas, Harlingen has a lower percent of the population that has either an Associate’s degree or higher; however, it is higher when compared to Cameron County as a whole. The percent of the population in Harlingen with less than a high school diploma is slightly greater when compared to Texas overall.

Educational Attainment			
	City of Harlingen	Cameron County	State of Texas
Less than 9th grade	16.0%	23.3%	9.7%
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	10.9%	13.7%	9.6%
High school graduate, GED	26.6%	24.0%	25.3%
Some college, no degree	20.4%	18.3%	22.8%
Associate’s degree	6.5%	5.8%	6.4%
Bachelor’s degree	14.1%	10.4%	17.5%
Graduate or professional degree	5.5%	4.5%	8.7%

Source: 2008-2012 American Community Survey 5 Year Estimates

Household Income

The household income in Harlingen very closely mirrors the household income in Cameron County overall. However, it is significantly less when compared to the State of Texas as a whole. Approximately 20.5% of households in Harlingen earn an income higher than \$75,000 compared to 33.3% in Texas. The median household income for Harlingen is below the median household income for Texas.

Household Income			
	City of Harlingen	Cameron County	State of Texas
Less than \$10,000	14.6%	14.4%	7.4%
\$10,000 to \$14,999	8.0%	9.5%	5.4%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	15.8%	16.1%	11.0%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	12.5%	13.0%	10.9%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	12.6%	13.5%	13.9%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	16.0%	15.9%	18.0%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	8.3%	7.3%	11.8%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	8.5%	6.9%	12.4%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	1.5%	1.7%	4.6%
\$200,000 or more	2.2%	1.6%	4.5%
Median Income	\$34,096	\$32,558	\$51,563
Average Income	\$51,382	\$47,544	\$71,651

Source: 2008-2012 American Community Survey 5 Year Estimates

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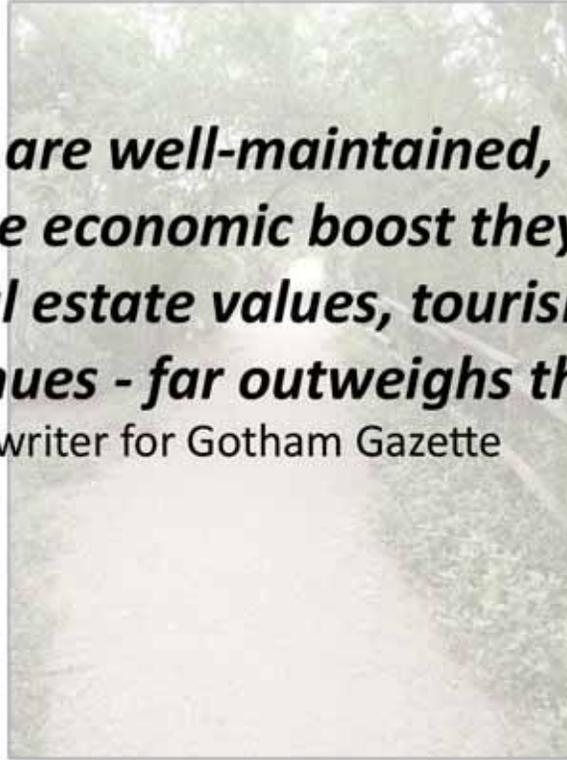
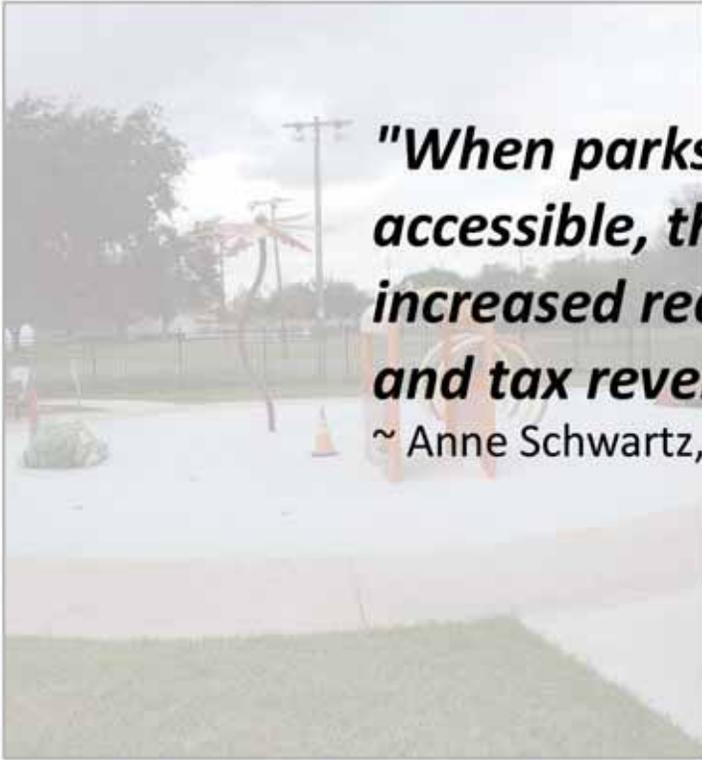


Park Standards and Existing Inventory

Chapter 3

"When parks are well-maintained, attractive and accessible, the economic boost they provide - in increased real estate values, tourism dollars, jobs and tax revenues - far outweighs the cost of upkeep."

~ Anne Schwartz, writer for Gotham Gazette



PURPOSE OF THE EXISTING PARK INVENTORY

Knowing what parks are in a park system is one of the traits of an outstanding parks system. It is important to understand what park, recreation and open space facilities are currently available and to assess the current condition of those facilities. This will in turn help to determine whether or not those facilities are addressing the current park and open space needs of the city.

Harlingen has an established network of neighborhood parks, larger community parks, and two nature parks. Often, the parks are well placed within the neighborhoods they serve and are well maintained. This section begins to identify park standards and the different park types in Harlingen.

PARK CATEGORIES

This master plan uses national and state guidelines which identify three broad categories of parks. These are:

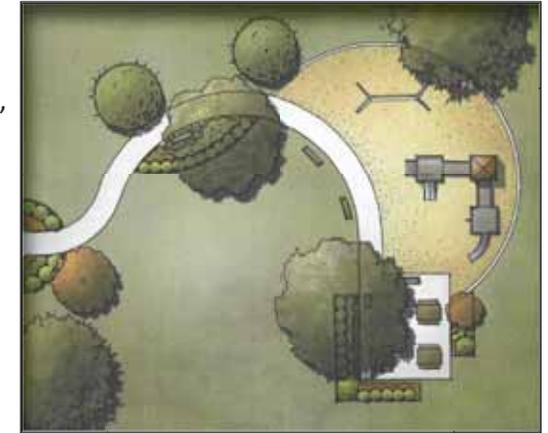
- **Local, Close to Home Parks** - These are usually located within the community served by the facility. They include mini parks, neighborhood parks, and community parks. Trail corridors, greenbelts and in some cases linear parks may also be considered Close to Home Parks.
- **Regional Parks** - These parks are usually located within an half hour to one hour driving distance for most of its visitors. Parks in this category serve a number of communities, and include city regional parks, park reserves, state parks, and national parks. Harlingen currently has no regional parks.
- **Unique Parks** - These parks can be either local or regional. They are defined as areas that are unique in some way, whether because of the physical features of the park, or because of the types of facilities provided within them. Parks in this category may include linear parks, special use parks, land conservancies, nature preserves, sports complexes, or botanical gardens.

PARK TYPES & STANDARDS IN HARLINGEN TODAY

The primary focus of this plan is City of Harlingen owned and operated parks. The following is a summary of the park types that are offered in Harlingen and the standards for each.

Mini Parks

This type of park is usually less than three acres in size. Mini parks are accessed by walking or bicycling. Vehicle access and parking is not typically needed because of their small size. Amenities in mini parks can include benches, landscaping, playgrounds, and other focal features. Size is not a key factor of the typical mini park, but rather the quality of the landscaping and features that go into the park. These parks are generally found in a residential or urban context, such as downtown. They are meant to serve as pockets of open space in the midst of mainly developed areas.



Typical mini park layout. (Source: Halff Associates, Inc.)



Gutierrez Park is an example of a mini park in Harlingen. (Source: Halff Associates, Inc.)

Neighborhood Parks

Because neighborhood parks are within easy walking or bicycling distance, they are a key part of the foundation for recreation in most cities like Harlingen. Neighborhood parks provide amenities for an entire family and typically serve one large or several small neighborhoods. Because of the physical topography, neighborhood parks can vary in size. Ideally, neighborhood parks in Harlingen should range from 3 to 15 acres in size. Examples of neighborhood parks in Harlingen include Windsor Park, C.B. Wood, Vestel Park, and Bohnam Park.

Accessible - Neighborhood parks should be accessible within a quarter-mile to a half-mile radius from the homes that they serve. Neighborhood parks should be accessible without having to cross major arterial streets, and should provide easy access for the users that surround it. One cost effective alternative is to locate neighborhood parks next to elementary schools so that the city and the school district can share acquisition and development costs (resulting in more efficient use of tax dollars).

Location - An ideal location for a neighborhood park is to be in the center of the neighborhoods it is meant to serve. Also, having local or minor collector streets on at least two sides of the park allows for easy pedestrian and bicycle accessibility.

Parking - Parking varies based on the size of the park, the availability of safe on-street parking, the facilities offered, and the number of users the park will attract. In general, the use of trails and sidewalks should be encouraged to decrease dependency on automobiles. Depending on the carrying capacity of adjacent streets, parallel on-street parking may provide sufficient parking space. Opportunities for shared parking may be possible with surrounding compatible facilities such as libraries, schools,

city buildings, etc.

Facilities - Typical neighborhood park facilities can include:

- Playground equipment for ages 2-5 and ages 6-12, with adequate safety surfacing around the playground. Shade structures over the playground are preferred.
- Unlighted practice fields for baseball/softball and soccer/football
- Unlighted multi-purpose courts for basketball, volleyball, or tennis
- Open space areas for unorganized play
- Picnic areas with benches, picnic tables, and cooking grills (some covered)
- Shade pavilions or gazebos
- Jogging/exercise trails
- Water fountains
- Parking, if space is available
- Restrooms if appropriate because of the use of the park. Restrooms typically are not placed in neighborhood parks because they increase maintenance, and these parks are ideally within walking distance of a person's home.

Design - The overall design and layout of a neighborhood park is important to its final quality and timelessness. These parks should generally be designed with the programmed space - playgrounds, pavilions, basketball courts, etc. - clustered into an "active zone" within the park. These areas need ample seating and shade to be hospitable year round. Constructing these areas near



Example of neighborhood parks in Harlingen. (Images source: Halff Associates, Inc.)

existing stands of trees is strongly recommended as this eliminates the years of waiting for shade trees to mature. The open/unprogrammed space should be visible from this activity area, but should be clearly delineated through plantings and hardscape features such as paved trails and seat walls. Finally, a looped trail is today considered a preferred component of a neighborhood park.

How the park integrates with the surrounding land uses such as residences, a school, a wooded area, etc. is crucial to the quality of experience within the park. When a road borders the park, it ensures that houses across the street face the park. When houses must back up to a park, require that fencing between the house and the park is transparent wrought iron

fencing (or similar) rather than wooden, tall, privacy fencing. Transparent fencing allows a softer transition between park and residence, and provides for informal surveillance of the park. In the future, preferably no more than 25% of any park's boundary should be bordered by the backs of houses, so as to not create a sense of uncomfortable enclosure within the park. When a park is constructed adjacent to a school, ensure that the two sites interact: work with Harlingen CISD to have paved connections between the school and the park.

Lastly, it is important to design neighborhood parks that are unique in character, respond to the surrounding environment, and provide unique experiences for the park's users.



Typical neighborhood park layout. (Source: Halff Associates, Inc.)

Community Parks

These parks are larger and are meant to serve a group of neighborhoods or a portion of the city. Community parks are usually reached by automobiles on collector streets, as well as by pedestrians and bicyclists who live nearby. Community parks are more than 15 acres in size, and have a two + mile service radius. The typical community park should be large enough so it can provide a variety of facilities while still leaving open space for unstructured recreation and natural areas. The park should also have room for expansion so that new facilities can be added to continue to attract users. Examples of community parks in Harlingen include Dixieland Park, Victor Park and and Pendleton Park.

Type - There are essentially two types of community parks: active and passive. Each type has a different set of facilities provided and an overall different character. Active community parks typically focus on high-intensity recreation such as lighted competitive game fields, recreation centers, and manicured vegetation.

Passive community parks, on the other hand, typically have low-intensity uses such as hiking, picnicking, and free play. Passive community parks generally have a large amount of natural and unprogrammed space in the park.

When a community park is large enough, it can sometimes be both types by having areas that are active and areas that are passive within the same park.

Location - Because of the potential for noise and bright lights at night, community parks should be buffered from adjacent residential areas. Since community parks are usually reached by automobiles, it is best to locate them near a major thoroughfare which provides easy access from different parts of the city.

Parking - Parking varies based on the facilities provided

and the size of the park. Additional parking is needed to accommodate facilities such as athletic fields or swimming pools that can be located in community parks. The National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) recommends a minimum of five spaces per acre with additional parking for added facilities. The specific amount of parking provided in each park should be determined by the facilities provided in that park.

Facilities - Typical community park facilities include:

- Jogging/exercise trail (recommended at least one mile in length), connecting to nearby destinations
- Covered picnic shelters with tables and grills
- Playground equipment for ages 2-5 and ages 6-12, with adequate safety surfacing around the playground and shade structures over the playground
- Open space areas for unorganized play
- Lighted athletic fields (suitable for organized competitive events)
- Restrooms
- Sufficient off-street parking based on facilities provided and the size of the park
- Security lighting
- Splash pads/spraygrounds
- Covered basketball court
- Other facilities as needed which can take advantage of the unique characteristics of the site such as nature trails, fishing ponds, swimming pool, dog parks, amphitheaters, recreation centers, sand volleyball courts, tennis courts, skate spots, etc.



Example of community parks in Harlingen. (Images source: Halff Associates, Inc.)

Design - As with neighborhood parks, the overall design and layout of a community park is important to the park's final quality and timelessness. Similarly, activity zones of programmed space are also important within community parks. Playgrounds, pavilions and basketball courts make up one type of active zone, while ball fields, concession stands and storage buildings make up another type. Again, providing shade by means of constructing the former of these two activity zone types near existing stands of trees is strongly recommended, as is the provision of benches and picnic tables. In community parks and other large parks, it is often desirable to delineate between activity zones and unprogrammed areas by

the use of natural features such as stands of trees or creek corridors where available. This helps to break up the park visually and delineate space. Paved trails should connect these various areas with each other, as well as provide a walking/jogging loop for recreational use.

The interaction between a community park and surrounding areas is crucial to the quality of experience within the park. Because community parks are often located outside of neighborhoods, there are different considerations than there are with a neighborhood park. As with neighborhood parks, it is important that the park is bordered by neighborhood roads and,

if feasible, creeks or other natural areas. When development does border the park, how the edge is addressed depends on the type of development. If the development is residential, ensure that the fencing between the houses and the park is transparent. However, if the development is industrial or otherwise aesthetically unpleasing or potentially a nuisance, the border should be fenced and heavily planted with trees and shrubs to soften the edge.

As a final consideration, it is important to understand that active community parks themselves can sometimes be a nuisance if near residential neighborhoods. Bright lighting at night, excessive noise from cheering spectators, or the overflow of parking onto neighborhood streets can all become major issues. If an active community park is to be developed in close proximity to a neighborhood, it should be designed with an adequate landscape buffer to provide visual screening and sound reduction, and design parking areas away from housing.



Example of a typical community park layout. (Source: Halff Associates, Inc.)

Regional Parks

Regional parks are intended to serve the entire city and very often become the premier park in that area. It is land that is dedicated as parkland due to its regional importance or relevance. This may be due to its natural characteristics including habitat, geological formations, and/or aesthetic beauty. Other reasons may be the role that the particular site plays in issues of regional importance: e.g. historical memorial, habitat protection, or ecological service including water conservation and flood protection. The size of a regional park can vary from less than ten acres to several thousand acres, depending on the purpose and character of the site. Regional parks are often under the ownership and control of county or state government.

Regional parks should be located near highways or major arterials to provide easy access from different parts of the city. Because of the potential for traffic, noise and bright lights, regional parks should be buffered from adjacent residential areas.

Special Use Parks

These types of parks are designed to accommodate specialized recreational activities. Because the facility needs for each activity are different, each special use park usually provides one or only a few activities. Examples of special use parks include:

- Athletic complexes
- Swimming pool/aquatic centers
- Tennis complexes
- Skate parks
- Golf courses
- Open space preserves or natural area parks
- Linear parks
- Downtown plazas

Athletic complexes and golf courses are the most common type of special use parks. Athletic complexes seek to provide fields for organized play in a location that can accommodate the traffic and noise that a large number of users can generate. Athletic complexes should include sufficient fields so that leagues can congregate at one facility and not have to spread out in different locations across the city. Evening activities at athletic complexes necessitate high-intensive lighting that can become a nuisance when the complex is located too close to residential areas. To address this, wide buffers should be placed around such complexes and/or they should be located adjacent to commercial or industrial areas.



Example of an athletic complex in Harlingen. (Images source: Halff Associates, Inc.)



Example of a nature park in Harlingen. (Images source: Halff Associates, Inc.)

Nature parks and preserves are a critical part of the land use system in any metropolitan area. They provide wildlife habitat, flood control, and places for passive recreation. These parks can greatly vary in size depending on the resources available, but are meant to have a citywide service radius.

The benefit and inclusion of places that are natural areas or unprogrammed open space has been largely overlooked in the context of typical park master plans. Conservation and preservation are especially valuable as, over time, natural resources disappear in our cities and natural habitat is wiped out. The value of walking through historic and natural places that have been left untouched is immeasurable. Such opportunities are rapidly becoming rare, and the identification and protection of such areas is urgently needed in most cities today. Cities that marshal the will and act quickly to conserve natural resources demonstrate the foresight and resolve necessary to ensure that future generations may enjoy something of beauty and timelessness.

Natural areas and open space are part of a city’s resources and are its natural gems. The value of such land may have visual, historic, and cultural appeal that imprints upon the visitor, creating a sense of place and lasting memories. Wilderness, creeks, ponds, prairies and particular geologic formations or topographic change may all be considered elements worthy of protection, public access, and celebration. As unprogrammed space, there is the added benefit of these areas as self-maintaining. There may be the occasional need to check for hazards, but maintenance is generally not a significant factor. Other than recreational and aesthetic opportunities afforded by natural areas, they also have huge economic value to society in terms of ecological services provided - functions such as water and air purification, carbon sequestration, flood control, pollination, air cooling, and positively effecting human health and well being.

Linear parks are open park areas that generally follow some natural or man-made feature that is linear in nature such as creeks, railroad right-of-ways, power line corridors, drainage corridors, or utility easements. Properly developed to facilitate pedestrian and bicycle travel, linear parks can serve to link or connect other parks in the local system, as well as schools, neighborhoods, the library, civic buildings, and other major destinations. They should also serve to help preserve open space. No specific standards apply to linear parks other than the park should be large enough to adequately accommodate the resources they contain.

Hike and bike trails, often found in linear parks, serve to provide active and passive recreation as well as connections between parks and other destinations within the City. A trails system should be established to serve both recreation needs and as a means of alternative transportation throughout the City. Such a system should provide each resident with quick and easy access to parks, retail, and employment areas.

An additional type of special use park is a “**special interest**” park which typically is developed as a skate park, dog park, or some other park designed to accommodate a special recreational need. Many cities only

accommodate one park of each special interest type (e.g. only one skate park per city). Although in the future, demand from residents might be able to sustain two or more of each type of special interest park. Another popular alternative is incorporating special interest park areas into larger community or regional parks.

SIZE OF THE PARKS SYSTEM IN HARLINGEN

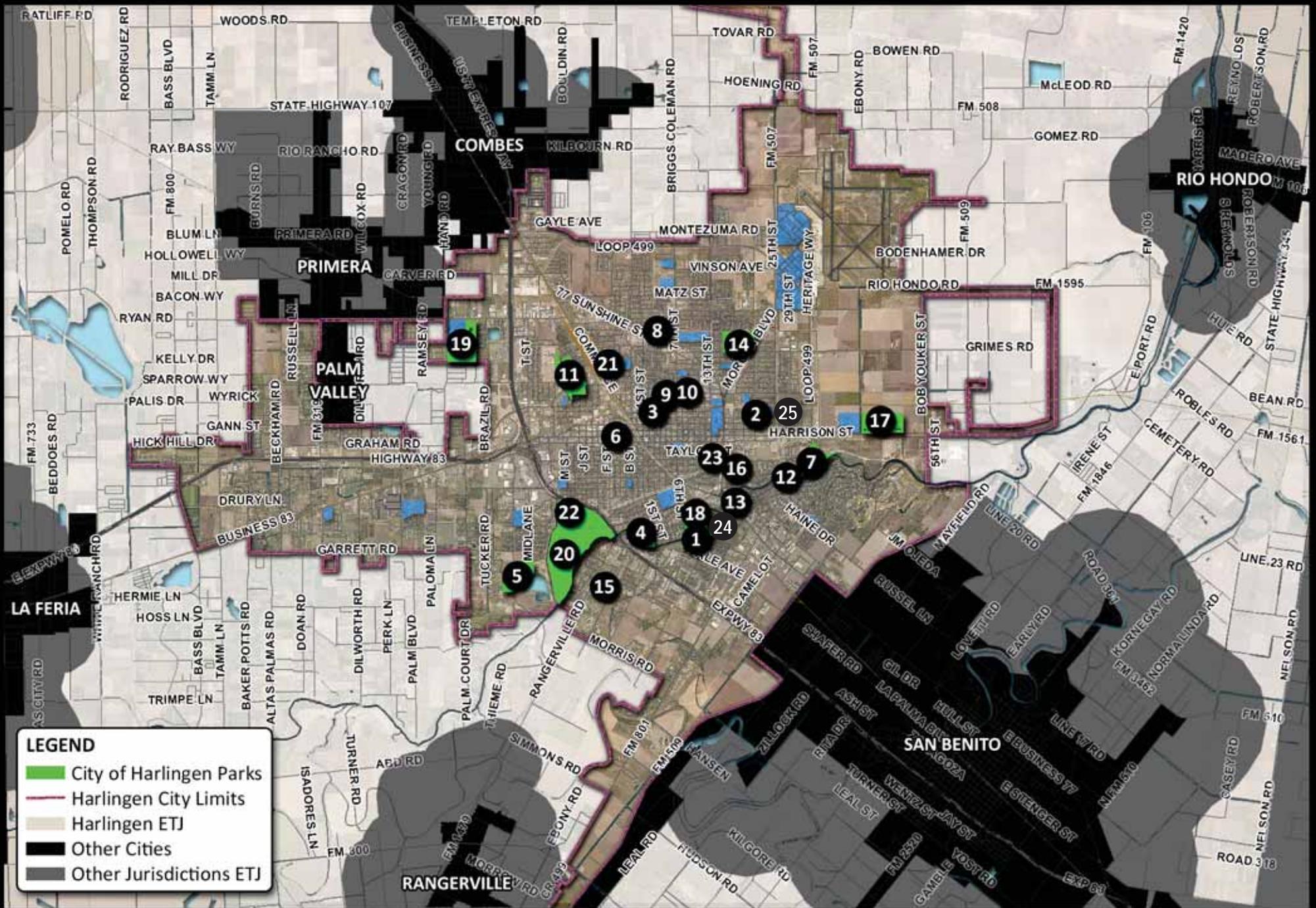
The size of the parks system in Harlingen consists of a total of 24 city-owned parks that contain approximately 563 acres.

Summary of Existing City-Owned Parks	
Total Number of Parks	24
Total System Acreage	562.7
Mini Parks	6 parks totaling 11.3 acres
Neighborhood Parks	5 parks totaling 51.6 acres
Community Parks	7 parks totaling 254.0 acres
Sports Complexes	2 parks totaling 151.4 acres
Nature Parks	2 parks totaling 94.4 acres
Largest Park (besides golf course)	Soccer Complex at 76.9 acres
Smallest Park	Revere Park at 0.6 acres
<i>Source: City of Harlingen</i>	

The table on the following pages summarizes the inventory of existing parks.

2016 Existing Park Inventory in Harlingen																				
Map #	Park Name	Acres	Backstops	Baseball Field	Basketball Court	Playground	Softball Field	Football / Soccer Field	Splash Pad	Swimming Pool	Tennis Court	Benches	Pavilions	Picnic Tables	Drinking Fountain	Community Center	Restroom Building	Trails (miles)	Parking (#)	
Mini Parks/Plazas																				
2	Bonham Park	2.24				1						4	1	1	1				42	
3	Bowie Park	2.07														1			95	
-	Centennial	0.82										6						.10	63	
6	Gutierrez Park (plaza)	2.07				1						25	1	5	1				43	
8	Hunter Park	1.54				2						5	1	2	1				10	
16	Revere Park	0.60																	0	
23	Windsor Park	1.99				2						4	2	10	1				9	
SUBTOTAL		11.33				6						44	5	18	4	1		0.10	262	
Neighborhood Parks																				
4	CB Wood Park	7.88				1						5	1	4	1			.29	8	
10	Liberty Gardens	7.03										3				1		.26	61	
12	McCullough Park	10.41																.62		
13	McKelvey Park	12.60				2						1	2	4	1		1	.24	47	
21	Vestal Park	13.64						3				5	1	1	1		1		70	
SUBTOTAL		51.56				3		3				14	4	9	3	1	2	1.41	186	
Community Parks																				
1	Arroyo Park	29.36			1	1	4					6	1	3	2		2	.46	142	
5	Dixieland Park	22.53				2						2	3		1		1		75	
9	Lake Harlingen	24.05										4						.76	54	
11	Lon C. Hill Park	59.17	1	2		2	1		1	1	1	4	6	15			1		371	
14	Pendelton Park	57.32		4	1	2	2			1	14		4	10	1			1.5	408	
15	Rangerville Park	23.08	2			2						3	3	3	1		1	.88	107	
22	Victor Park	38.10		5		2		2		1	6	4	5	15			1		363	
SUBTOTAL		253.61	3	11	2	11	7	2	1	3	21	23	22	46	5		6	3.60	1520	

2016 Existing Park Inventory in Harlingen																			
Map #	Park Name	Acres	Backstops	Baseball Field	Basketball Court	Playground	Softball Field	Football / Soccer Field	Splash Pad	Swimming Pool	Tennis Court	Benches	Pavilions	Picnic Tables	Drinking Fountain	Community Center	Restroom Building	Trail (miles)	Parking (#)
Sports Complexes																			
17	Soccer Complex	76.94				1		12				6	6	12			1	1.2	635
19	Harlingen Sports Complex	27.50																	229
19	Tom Wilson Sports	47.47		8	2	2	4	2				12	6	30	4		3	1.0	504
SUBTOTAL		151.91		8	2	3	4	14				18	12	42	4		4	2.2	1368
Nature Preserves/Trails																			
7	Hugh Ramsey	48.91										6	1	6	1		1	1.5	45
18	Thicket Nature Trail	45.47										1	1	4	1		1	1.5	20
24	Arroyo Trail																	2.63	
25	25th Street Hike & Bike Trail																	4.5	
SUBTOTAL		94.38										7	2	10	2		2	10.13	65
CITYWIDE TOTAL (WITHOUT TONY BUTLER GOLF COURSE)																			
		562.79	3	19	4	23	11	19	1	3	21	106	45	125	18	2	14	17.44	3401



Existing Parks

Harlingen Parks and Recreation Master Plan



GRAPHIC SCALE





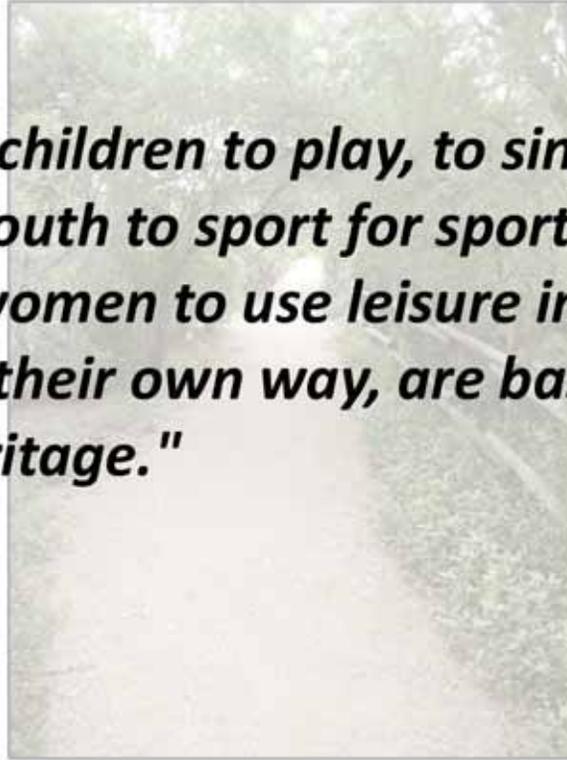
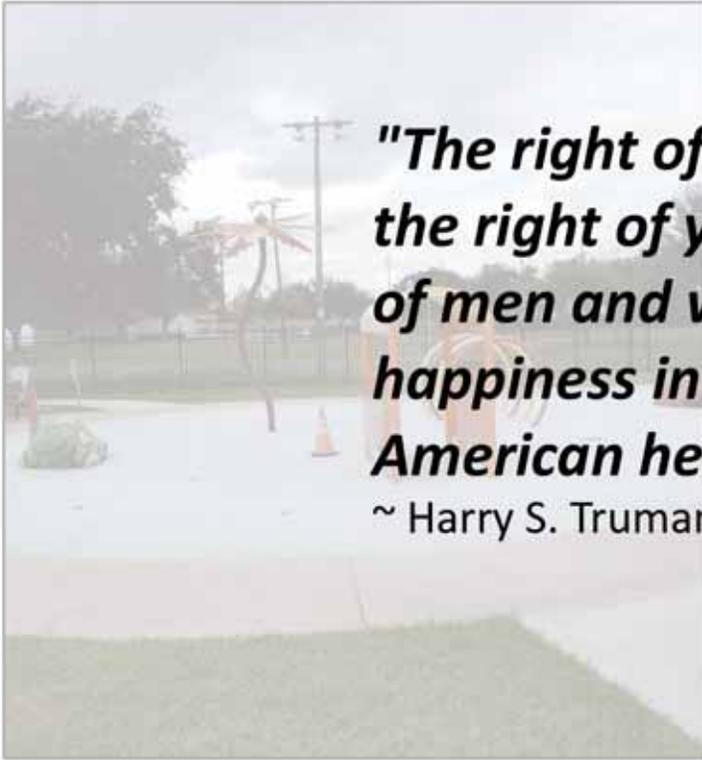


Needs Assessment

Chapter 4

"The right of children to play, to sing and to dance; the right of youth to sport for sport's sake; the right of men and women to use leisure in the pursuit of happiness in their own way, are basic to our American heritage."

~ Harry S. Truman



UNDERSTANDING HARLINGEN'S PARK NEEDS

An assessment of what deficiencies exist in the parks system is vital so that planning can occur to address those deficiencies. It is also important to determine what future needs are. In essence, a needs assessment is an analytical way of assessing what facilities are most desired by the citizens of Harlingen, and determining which needs are the most critical.

Harlingen has one of the best park systems in the Rio Grande Valley, at least in terms of the amount of parkland. Excellent planning in the past has led to the acquisition of well sited properties for park development, and as a result parkland acquisition is not as critical of a need as it is in other area communities (with the exception of West and North Harlingen).

Harlingen's immediate needs stem from the popularity of its major community parks and the resulting heavy use of its park facilities. With the city's year round outdoor climate, recreation facilities are heavily used and allowed little time to recuperate. The major community parks are very well located, which also contributes to their high amount of use. The needs assessment points to the need for a combined strategy of enhancing existing parks and developing additional facilities that help alleviate the intense usage of the existing community parks.

Assessment Methods

A variety of different inputs and techniques are used in evaluating Harlingen's current and future park needs. Three methodologies are included in the needs assessment analysis. These techniques follow general methodologies accepted by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department for local park master plans. These three techniques are:

- **Standard-based Assessment** - This technique uses locally developed "target" level of service ratios of facilities to population so as to project where the city is today and where it might be in the future as the population grows.
- **Demand-based Assessment** - This technique uses actual and/or anticipated usage growth data, as well as citizen input on the types of activities they would like to engage in, to determine which facilities and programs are most in demand.
- **Resource-based Assessment** - This technique recognizes that Harlingen has many unique physical features (such as the Arroyo Colorado), and explores how to convert these into recreation or open space assets that help to meet the demand for recreation in the City. Examples of potential physical resources in Harlingen might include the arroyos.

All three methods are important in their own regard, but individually do not represent the entire picture. This assessment, and the recommendations resulting from it, uses findings from all three methods to determine what types of recreation facilities and park requirements are needed in Harlingen. Ultimately, these needs are vetted by the citizens of Harlingen, and are determined to best represent the key park and recreational needs of the city.

STANDARD-BASED ASSESSMENT

The national guidelines and standards that were created decades ago were based on demographic trends rather than specific local desires, and are now intended to serve as a starting point for park planning. Each city has its own unique geographic, demographic, and socioeconomic composition, and as such, the arbitrary application of national standards would not necessarily meet the needs of a particular community. Therefore, national standards are no longer used

The Level of Service (LOS) based assessment uses target level of service established by the local jurisdiction, in this case the City of Harlingen, to determine the quantity of park facilities required to meet the City's needs.

These target levels of service usually are expressed as the quantity of park facilities needed to adequately serve a given ratio of residents. These targets are established to provide the level of service that the particular jurisdiction believes is the most responsive to the amount of use and the interest of its citizens.

This plan establishes individual city specific levels of service for Harlingen, and does not rely on national standards that may not be applicable to Harlingen.

to project facility needs since they are based on a “one size fits all” type of evaluation. Instead, the standards are fine-tuned to meet local conditions.

This master plan utilizes the existing level of service in the city as a starting point and determines whether that level of service is adequate, or whether it need to be increased or decreased. Public input is used to determine how to adjust the current level of service, as well as the anticipated growth of the city, and what parts of Harlingen are well served and what parts are not. Local needs and desires are used to mold these guidelines to meet the expectations of the citizens of Harlingen in a realistic manner.

Three types of level of service determinations are made as shown below.

- **Spatial Level of Service** - Defines the quality context of parkland needs, and is expressed as a ratio of acreage to population. More importantly, it also defines the distribution of parks throughout Harlingen.
- **Access Level of Service** - Geographically determines how easy it is for Harlingen residents to access parkland, and determines where parkland is needed to meet the City’s target level of service.
- **Facility Level of Service** - Defines the number of facilities recommended serving each particular recreation need. Facility standards are usually expressed as a ratio of units of one particular facility per population size. For example, a facility standard for a recreation center might be one square foot for every resident of the city.

The Need for Park Acreage (Spatial Level of Service)

The purpose of spatial levels of service for parks and recreational areas is to ensure that sufficient area is allocated for all the outdoor recreation needs of a community. They allow a city to plan ahead so that parkland can be targeted and acquired before it is developed and can no longer be used as parkland. To help determine an appropriate level of service, a “target” level is incorporated into this master plan. These spatial standards are expressed as a ratio of parkland to the number of residents in Harlingen.

Developing and applying a target level of service for park acreage results in acreage standards for different types of parks. Neighborhood parks and community parks are the primary park types to focus on as they provide close-to-home park space. Additional acreage is required both in order to serve the existing and future population, but also to allow for the development of additional neighborhood and community parks evenly spaced throughout the City. The goal is to provide close-to-home parks within a 5 to 10 minute walking distance of each resident in Harlingen.

Neighborhood Parks in Harlingen

Neighborhood parks are typically centrally located in a neighborhood or central to the several smaller neighborhoods that it serves. A neighborhood park in Harlingen is 3 to 15 acres in size. They should be integrated into the community in a prominent manner during the design phase, and not layered in as an afterthought during construction.

A mini park is a type of close-to-home park that serves a smaller number of residents and is therefore smaller in size. They are typically less than three acres in size and provide public gathering places for residents. For the purpose of this analysis, the city’s mini parks are included with neighborhood parks.

The prominence of neighborhood parks reflects the importance of having them as centerpieces of a neighborhood. The recommended target level of service goal of 1.5 acres of neighborhood parks for every 1,000 residents is continued from the previous parks master plan. This target reflects the goal of providing parks within walking distance of all residents in Harlingen.

Harlingen currently has 51.56 acres of city-owned neighborhood parks and 11.33 acres of mini-parks for a total of 62.89 acres of “neighborhood” parks. Combined, these yield an existing level of service of 0.94 acres for every 1,000 residents of the City. Future needs of neighborhood parks to meet the target level of service are summarized below.

Existing Neighborhood Parks in Harlingen

- Recommended LOS - 1.5 acres per every 1,000 residents.
- Current acres = 62.89 acres
- Current LOS = 0.94 acres for every 1,000 residents.
- % of Recommended LOS = 63%

Since neighborhood parks serve as a central gathering place for residents, accessibility is a critical component of these parks more so than any other park type. As discussed earlier, the preferred ideal service area for access to a park from any neighborhood in Harlingen is one-quarter (1/4) mile. The preferred maximum service area for a neighborhood park is one-half (1/2) mile. In no case should access to close-in parks require that a child or young person cross a major collector or arterial road.

The suggested benchmark that all residents of Harlingen be within 1/2 mile walking distance of a park or green space of any kind within ten years will result in parks that are designed to be more centralized in their neighborhoods so as to improve access. Note that for the purposes of access, every neighborhood park and parts of community parks in Harlingen can be considered the “park” for the areas close to it. The map on the following page illustrates the distribution and service areas for neighborhood parks in Harlingen.

Future needs for neighborhood parks to meet the target level of service are summarized to the right.

Neighborhood Parks Summary of Needs:

- Recommended LOS = 1.5 acres for every 1,000 residents
- Recommended target level of access = 100% of residences in Harlingen will be within 1/2 mile of a park, trail or open space within ten years.

Year 2016

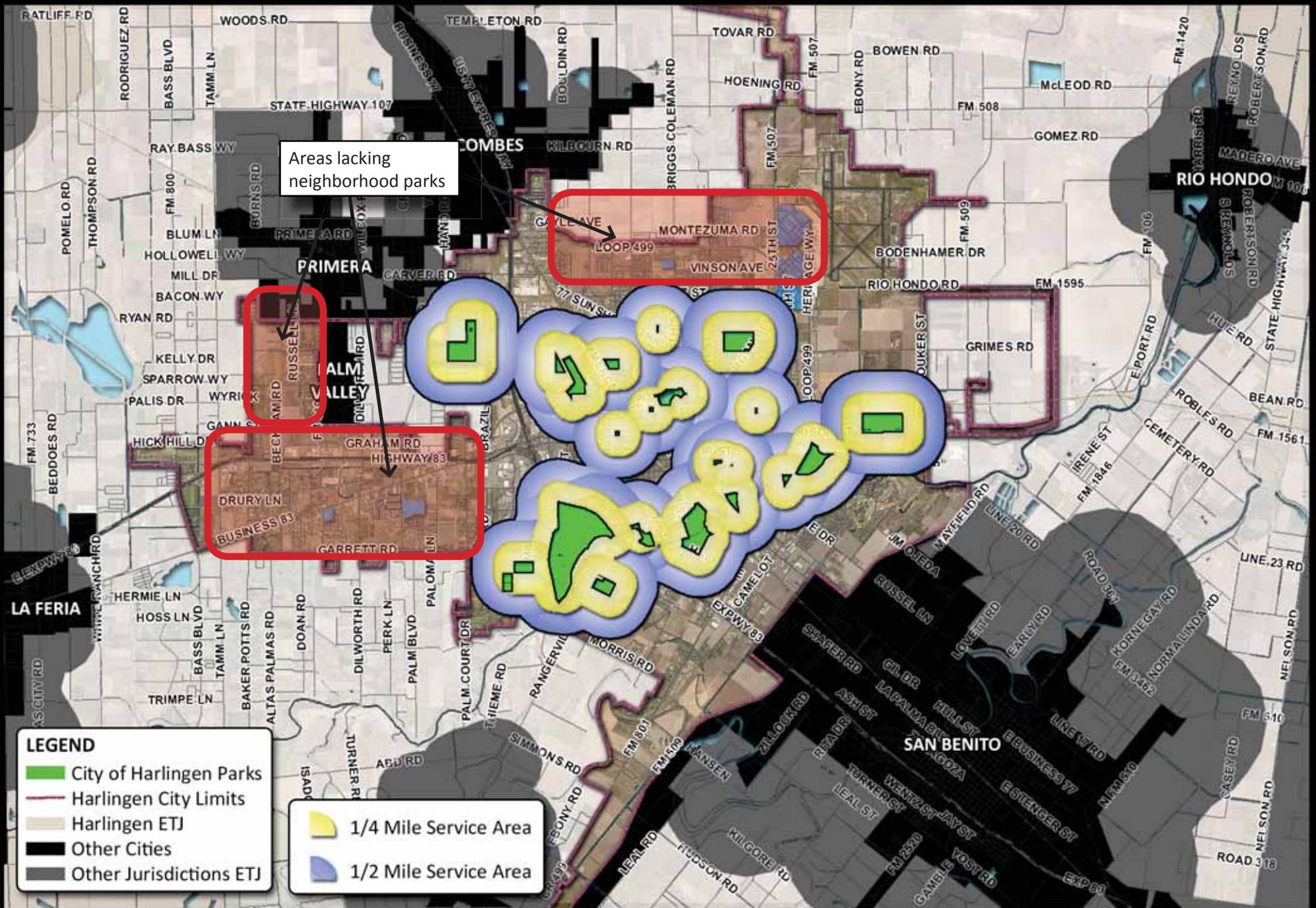
- Current need with 67,000 population = target of 100.5 acres, deficit of 38 acres+/-.
- Access in 2016 = 67% of residences within 1/2 mile of a park, 29% of residences within 1/4 mile of a park.

Year 2025

- Need with projected 82,000 population = target of 123 acres, deficit of 60 acres +/-.

Year 2035

- Projected need with 96,000 population = target of 144 acres, deficit of 81 acres+/-.



Neighborhood Park Service Areas

Harlingen Parks and Recreation Master Plan



GRAPHIC SCALE



Community Parks

Community parks are large parks that serve several neighborhoods or a portion of a city. They serve as locations for larger community events, sports and activities. Therefore, they contain many popular recreation and support facilities. Because of the larger service area and additional programs, community parks are more heavily used, increasing the potential for facility deterioration.

The additional facilities associated with a community park increase the spatial requirements necessary for this type of park. Also, community parks often require parking for users who drive from surrounding areas, which increases the amount of space needed. The recommended standard for community parks is 5 acres for every 1,000 residents.

Harlingen currently has seven community parks, as well as two sports complexes that often serve the same function as a typical community park so they are included in this analysis. The nine parks total 405.52 acres of community parkland, yielding an existing level of service of 6.05 acres for every 1,000 residents. Future needs for community parkland are listed below.

Existing Community Parks in Harlingen

- Recommended LOS - 5.0 acres per every 1,000 residents.
- Current acres = 405.52 acres
- Current LOS = 6.05 acres for every 1,000 residents.
- % of Recommended LOS = 121%

Community parks serve a larger portion of a city. Since they are typically accessed by car, the preferred service area for a community park is approximately two miles. Acquisition of land for community parks will be a key need as the city continues to grow.

Community Parks Summary of Needs:

- Recommended LOS = 5.0 acres for every 1,000 residents

Year 2016

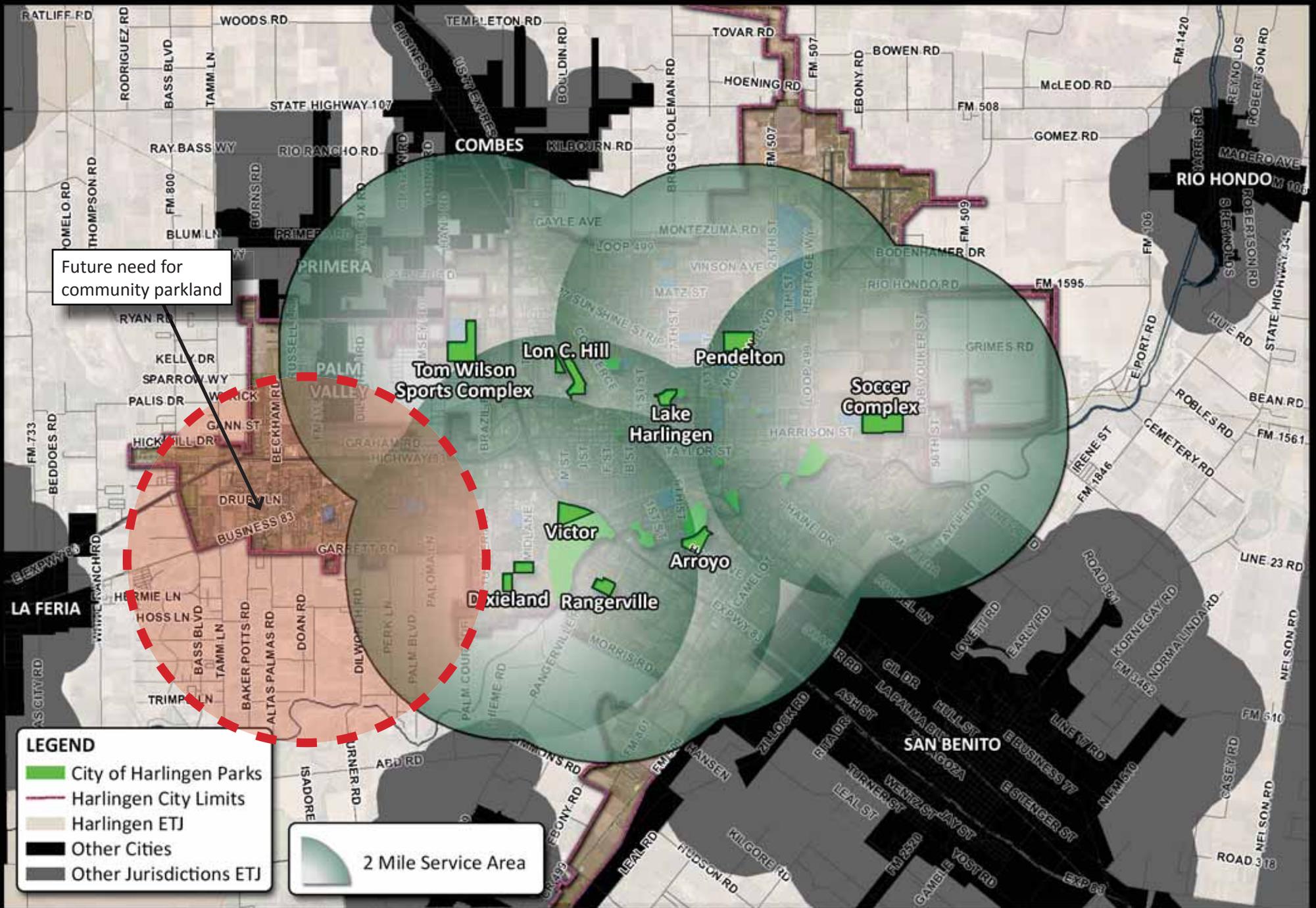
- Current need with 67,000 population = target of 335 acres, no current deficit.

Year 2025

- Need with projected 82,000 population = target of 410 acres, minor deficit of 5 acres. However, a community park for West Harlingen is needed.

Year 2035

- Projected need with 96,000 population = target of 480 acres, deficit of 75 acres.



Community Park Service Areas

Harlingen Parks and Recreation Master Plan



GRAPHIC SCALE



Special Purpose Parks

Special purpose parks are areas designated for a special purpose and can include park types such as sports complexes, aquatic centers, linear parks, plazas or downtown courtyards. Harlingen currently has three sports complexes and two nature parks that can be considered special purpose. These parks total approximately 246.29 acres.

Because special purpose parks vary by size, type and from city to city, there are no specific recommended levels of service.

The two sports complexes Harlingen can also serve day to day as community parks. Trails, pavilions, and play features, when added to parks such as these, increase the usefulness both to the leagues that use the park and the residents that live nearby.

Regional Parks

Regional parks are intended to serve the entire city and surrounding region. Like community parks, they act as locations for larger community events, tournaments, or activities. Most regional parks near Harlingen are county owned and operated parks. The City of Harlingen currently does not have any parks that are designated as regional; however, because of the surplus of community parks, a regional park is not deemed to be necessary. Although not owned by the city, the Arroyo Colorado is an appropriate size and draws regionally, so it could be considered as a regional park. Similar to special purpose parks, there is no specific spatial level of service for regional parks.

Open Space

Open space comes in many forms. It can be the expanses of water and green along the arroyos, or simply the designated parks within the City. Open spaces are the green ribbons that break up the developed areas of a city. Simply because they are different, these open spaces stand out and can make Harlingen a more memorable city.

Existing open space in Harlingen includes all designated parks, totaling approximately 563 acres, yielding an existing level of service of 8.4 acres for every 1,000 residents.

Future open space should be preserved if it has some unique value, and not simply to meet a specific acreage target. Therefore, the suggested target level of service for open space shown should be treated as a benchmark noting where the city is today, and to provide a target to strive to meet.

Preserved open space serves a significant function in terms of wildlife habitat, flood control, and improved air and water quality; however, without being publicly accessible it cannot provide any recreational benefits to the community. While not all open space preserves should be accessed, this master plan recommends that significant preservation efforts be sought along the Arroyo Colorado, with key public access points for the added benefit of recreation.

Open Space Summary of Needs:

- Recommended LOS = 10 to 15 acres for every 1,000 residents

Year 2016

- Current need with 67,000 population = target of 670 to 1,005 acres.

Year 2025

- Need with projected 82,000 population = target of 820 to 1,230 acres.

Year 2035

- Projected need with 96,000 population = target of 960 to 1,440 acres.

FACILITY ASSESSMENT LEVEL OF SERVICE

Facility standards and target levels of service define the number of facilities recommended to serve each particular type of recreation. They are expressed as the usage capacity served by each recreational unit, as well as the level of access to each type of facility from all parts of the city. The target levels of service shown on the following pages are based on comparisons with recognized standards, comparisons to other similar cities in Texas, the actual number of facilities in Harlingen, and the amount of use each facility receives.

The following pages have a description of the 2016 target level of service for each recreational facility. Facility needs are based both on ratios related to existing population, as well as the amount of demand for each type which is based on public input and user information where available. As with the acreage standards discussed earlier, the facility target levels of service are adjusted based on Harlingen's unique recreational goals.

The target level of service for each type of facility is determined as a guide to provide the most basic recreation facilities to the community. The target timeframe for each facility is five to ten years.

Developing Target Levels of Service for Facilities

The National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA), in their publication *Recreation, Park and Open Space Standards and Guidelines*, edited by R.A. Lancaster, defines recreation and park standards in this manner:

“Community recreation and park standards are the means by which an agency can express recreation and park goals and objectives in quantitative terms, which in turn, can be translated into spatial requirements for land and water resources. Through the budget, municipal ordinances, cooperative or joint public-private efforts, these standards are translated into a system for acquisition, development and management of recreation and park resources.”

The publication further describes the role standards have in establishing a base for the amount of land required for various types of park and recreation facilities, in developing the community's acceptable minimum correlating needs to spatial requirements, and for providing justification for recreational expectations and needs.

The national and state standards are a useful guide in determining minimum requirements; however, the City of Harlingen must establish its own standards in consideration of expressed needs of the residents and the city's economic, operational, and maintenance capabilities.

Existing and Future Park and Recreation Facility Needs							
Facility	Current Number	Current LOS (1 facility per capita)	NRPA Standard	Harlingen's Target LOS	2025 Need (Based on potential 82,000+)	2025 Surplus / Deficit	Level of Need
Baseball Fields	19	3,526	1 per 5,000	1 per 5,000 residents	17	No deficit	Medium - Continue to ensure that the existing fields are maintained at a high level, and upgrade fields as needed.
Softball Fields	11	6,090	1 per 5,000	1 per 5,000 residents	17	Deficit of 6	Medium - Provide more fields designated for both girls and adult softball. Ensure that existing fields are highly maintained.
Basketball Courts	4	16,581	1 per 2,500	1 per 10,000 residents	8	Deficit of 4	High - These are often one of the more popular amenities in a park because they allow for spontaneous games among people of all ages.
Football/Soccer Fields	19	3,526	1 per 10,000	1 per 5,000 residents	17	No deficit, but addition of soccer fields at the Soccer Complex completes the facility for tournaments	High - Currently only one field is designated for football. Construct additional multipurpose flat fields that can be used by several sports such as soccer, football, lacrosse, or field hockey. Complete Soccer Complex build-out for local and regional tournament play.
Tennis Courts	21	3,158	1 per 2,000	1 per 5,000 residents	17	No current deficit	Low - There is currently a good supply of tennis courts and most have been renovated in recent years.
Playgrounds	23	2,884	1 per 1,000	1 per 2,000 residents	41	Deficit of 18	High - The availability of close proximity to neighborhoods is key for playgrounds. Newer, more challenging units should be introduced when play areas in community parks are renovated.
All inclusive playground	0	NA	NA	1 per city	1	Deficit of 1	High - The city needs a large "destination" playground with all inclusive (wheelchair suitable) features.
Swimming Pools	3	22,300	1 per 20,000	1 per 30,000 residents	3	No deficit in size, but enhancements are needed	Medium - The two existing pools offer very few amenities that are typically found in more modern aquatic centers. Renovations and expansions to the existing pools should include slides, water play features, zero depth beach entry and a current channel or lazy river.
Splash Pad	1	66,324	NA	1 per 25,000 residents	3	Deficit of 2	High - Splash pads provide a lower cost aquatic facility for cities, and are most popular in parks when located adjacent to family gathering areas.

Existing and Future Park and Recreation Facility Needs							
Facility	Current Number	Current LOS (1 facility per capita)	NRPA Standard	Harlingen's Target LOS	2025 Need (Based on potential 82,000+)	2025 Surplus / Deficit	Level of Need
Trails (in miles)	10.3	6,504	1 per 10,000	1 per 5,000 to 7,500 residents	11 to 16 miles	Deficit of up to 6 miles	High - Trails are one of the most sought after amenities in the city and were consistently ranked as a high priority during the public input process.
Rental/Picnic Pavilions	45	1,500	1 per 2,000	1 per 2,000 residents	40 to 45 in a variety of sizes	No deficit, but more are needed in major parks	High - Pavilions provide shaded, central gathering areas for events and reunions or for daily picnicking. These facilities are among the most popular park amenities in most cities.
Backstops	3	22,108	NA	1 per 5,000 residents	17	Deficit of 14	Very High - Practice fields are essential to a community to ensure the quality of athletic game fields are maintained at a higher level.
Picnic Facilities - tables, benches, bbq grills, drinking fountains	Varies	Varies	NA	Varies	In every park	Add to every park	High - This is a key facility need in all parks. Replace dated and damaged picnic facilities on a regular basis.
Dog Park	1	1 per city	NA	1 to 2 per city	2	Deficit of 1	Medium - This is the fastest growing facility within city parks across the nation and is provided in most cities in Texas.
Skate Park	1 (at Boys & Girls Club)	1 per city	NA	1 to 2 per city	2	Deficit of 1	Medium - This can be a full scale skate park or skate spots within existing larger parks. These facilities are very popular among teens and young adults.
Disc Golf Course	1	1 per city	NA	1 to 2 per city	2	Deficit of 1	Medium - Disc golf has become a very popular activity and is relatively inexpensive to install and play.
Sand Volleyball Court	0	NA	1 per 5,000	1 per 10,000 residents	8	Deficit of 8	Very High - Sand volleyball is a relatively easy addition to an existing park and a very popular facility.
Support Facilities - restrooms, concrete sidewalks, parking	Varies	Varies	NA	Varies	As needed	As needed	High in some parks - These facilities should be included in all community parks and larger neighborhood parks.

DEMAND BASED ASSESSMENT

Demand was also used to determine what additional facilities are needed in Harlingen. Demand is based both on actual participation in organized activities and in use of the parks, as well as by the level of use and preferences expressed by citizens through the citizen telephone survey and public meetings.

Determining demand through citizen input is a critical part of any park planning process. Public entities work for their citizens by managing and providing the types of facilities that the residents and taxpayers of that community want to have. In the park planning process, citizen input helps identify what types of existing facilities are being used, where key deficiencies may occur, and where the citizens of Harlingen would like to see their funding targeted. This input can also be compared to input received from other similar cities and from previous surveys so that long term trends can be identified. In essence, the residents of a community determine what they want to have in their city through their current use of those facilities and through their input.

The multiple methods that were used to generate demand during the planning process include:

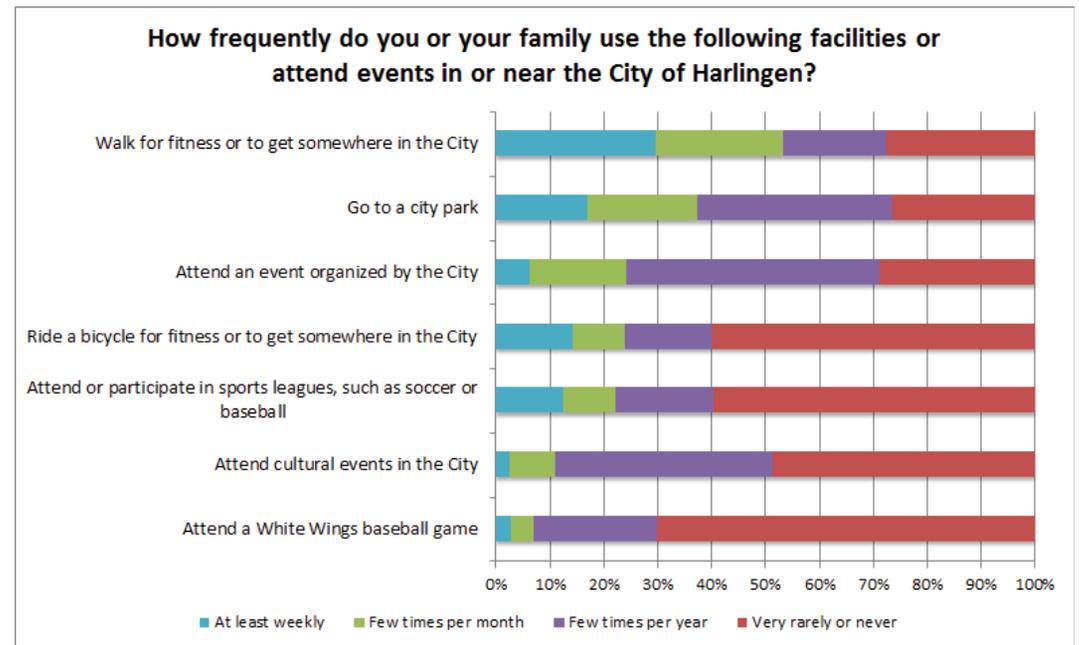
- A citywide mail-out survey and companion online survey (generated as part of a parallel citywide planning process)
- Citywide public meetings/open houses

A summary of the key findings of the demand based assessment is discussed below and on the following pages.

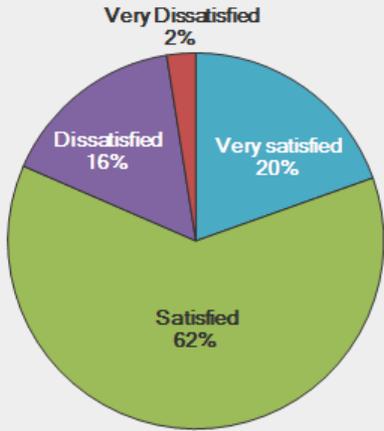
Citywide Citizen Survey

To better understand the recreational needs and desires of Harlingen residents, citizen comments and concerns regarding recreation were derived from multiple questions contained in a citizen survey that was conducted as part of a parallel citywide planning process. The survey was designed to examine residents' participation in recreational activities, as well as to assess recreational needs throughout Harlingen among other city related issues. 330 completed paper surveys were returned. A companion online survey was available to anyone living in Harlingen or surrounding areas. An additional 356 surveys were completed using the online version. The combined results of the survey are shown on the following pages.

Frequency of Use - The survey respondents were asked how often they utilize different city facilities. More than half (53%) indicated that they walk for fitness or to get somewhere in the City at least a few times a month or more. More than one-third (37%) have visited a city park a few times a month or more. The responses to the current frequency of use are shown in the graph below.



How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the overall quality of life in the City of Harlingen?

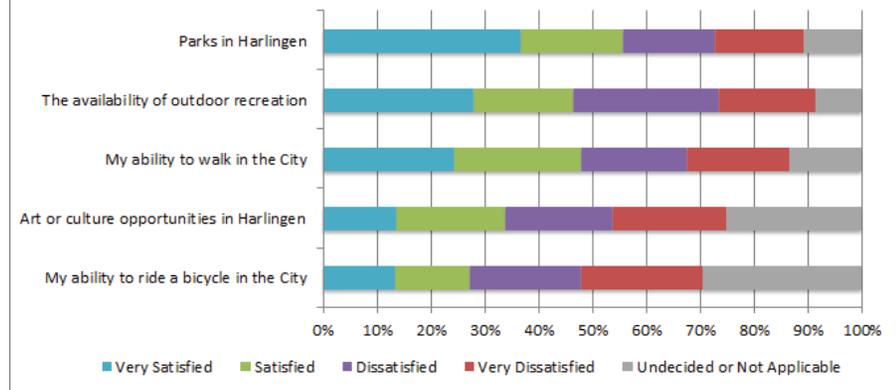


Satisfaction with Quality of Life - The survey respondents were asked the general question of how satisfied or dissatisfied they are with the quality of life in Harlingen. Quality of life refers to those things that make Harlingen a good place to live such as recreation, entertainment, housing, job opportunities, and medical facilities. 82%

of the respondents indicated they are either satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of life in the city. Asking for residents’ overall satisfaction is very important in that it establishes a base level that can be tracked in subsequent surveys over time.

Satisfaction with Services - The survey participants were given a list of different services offered within the city, some provided by the City of Harlingen and other provided by the private sector. The survey respondents were then asked to rate how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with each service. Over three-fourths (76%) of respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied with the parks in Harlingen. More than half the respondents are either satisfied or very satisfied with the availability of outdoor recreation (63%), their ability to walk in the city (59%), and art or culture opportunities in the city (56%). Only 40% are satisfied or very satisfied with their ability to ride a bicycle in Harlingen; however, when asked the follow up question of what they feel is the least important for the city to improve, the ability to ride a bicycle was ranked as one of the top three least important improvements to make.

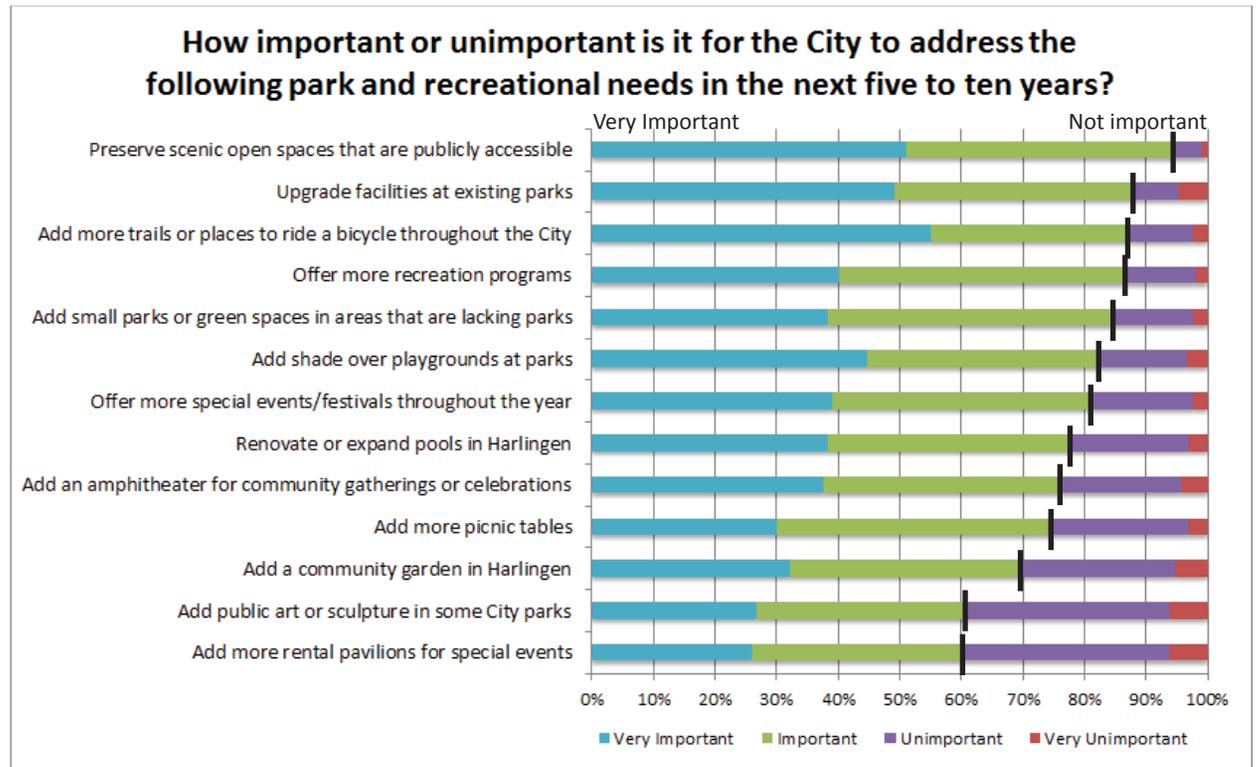
How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with each of the following services within Harlingen?



Future Park Needs - The survey participants were given a list of potential park improvements and were asked to rank how important they felt each one was for the city. The most important improvement was preserving scenic open spaces that are publicly accessible with 95% indicating this was either important or very important. 91% felt it was important or very important to upgraded facilities at existing parks, while 87% felt it was important or very important to add more trails or places to ride a bicycle throughout the entire city. The responses are shown in chart to the right.

Single Most Important Need - When asked the follow up question which recreational item is the most important for the city to address, the top five responses were:

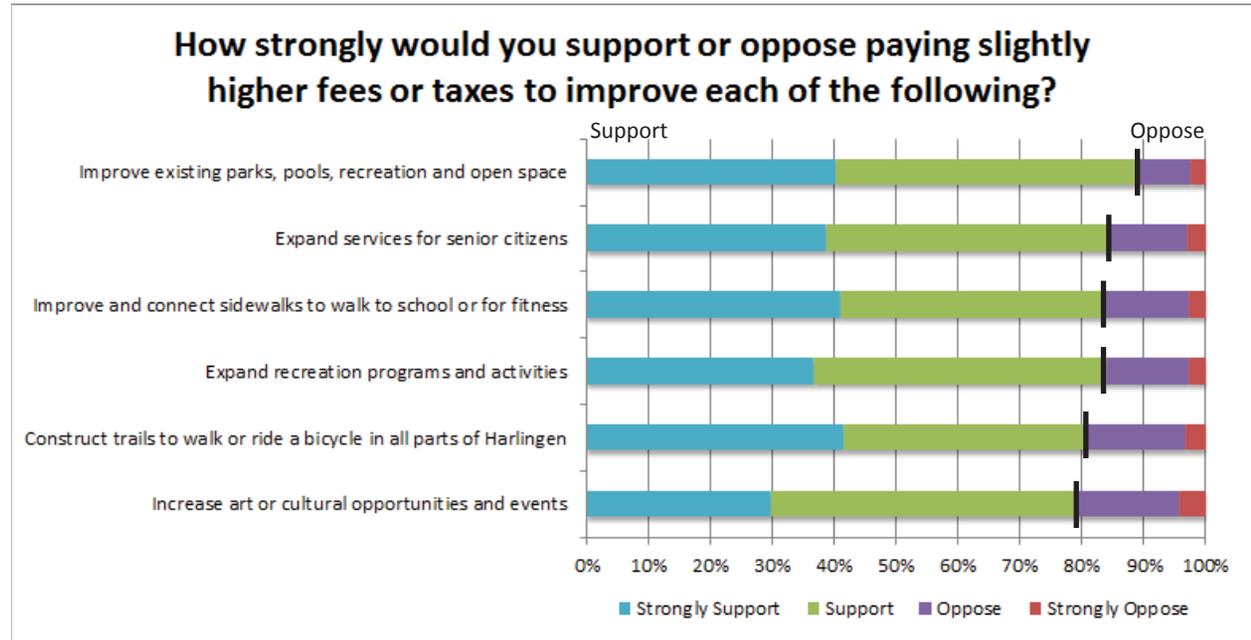
1. Upgrade facilities at existing parks (20%)
2. Add more trails or places to ride a bicycle (18%)
3. Add a more formal amphitheater for community gatherings or celebrations (9%)
4. Renovate or expand pools in Harlingen (9%)
5. Preserve scenic open spaces that are publicly accessible (8%)



Support for Recreation Improvements -

One final question on the survey asked the respondents how likely would they be to support different types of improvements in the city by paying slightly higher fees or taxes.

90% indicated they would support or strongly support improving existing parks, pools, recreation and open space. 85% would either support or strongly support expanded services for senior citizens, while 85% would support or strongly support improved and connecting sidewalks to walk to school or for fitness, 84% would support or strongly support expanded recreation programs and activities, and 84% would support or strongly support improving and connecting sidewalks to walk to school or for fitness, and to expand recreation programs and activities. The results are shown in the graph to the right.





Public Meeting/Open House

During the public input process for the city’s Comprehensive Plan, four citywide public forums were held. The first public meeting was held on October 12, 2013, and discussed the quality of life in Harlingen including the topics of public safety, tourism, and parks and recreation. During the meeting, residents were given a brief presentation about each topic, and then were divided into groups to discuss what they feel are greatest strengths and concerns of each topic within the city. For parks and recreation, residents noted that the strengths of the parks system were lots of park space, the potential to connect trails, Tony Butler Municipal Golf Course, the quality of the sports facilities, and variety of amenities within parks.



Wordle Image of resident answers to what they like best about parks and recreation in Harlingen.

The top improvements that the meeting attendees listed were more trails, more lighting, increased funding for maintenance, and better promotion of park events.

RESOURCE BASED ASSESSMENT

The City of Harlingen has two unique features that should be preserved and adapted for limited recreational use where feasible. These are the Arroyo Colorado and the numerous irrigation canals that cross the city.



Arroyo Colorado – As noted previously, the arroyo should be preserved for public use and as a wildlife corridor throughout the length of the city. Currently, the floodway zone of the arroyo is controlled by the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC). However, the upper banks of the arroyo and the properties adjacent to it are most often privately controlled, which limits access by much of the general public to the arroyo. Policies should be adopted that require donation of corridors for trails along the upper banks of the arroyo as development occurs,

and that also promote the construction of parkway roads along the upper edges of the arroyo (set back so as not to unduly disturb wildlife within the corridor). The actual width of the arroyo should be considered to be wider than just upper bank to upper bank, but should also include a minimum of a 50 to 100' setback along the top of the arroyo zone on either side.

The arroyo lands are already undevelopable, so their value is in their use as open space preserves for all of the residents of the city. The arroyo can also provide a corridor for flood resistant trails, scenic overlooks, wildlife viewing blinds, and in some cases along the upper banks, as in the case of CB Wood Park, as a site for neighborhood park facilities.

Irrigation Canals – The many irrigation canals throughout the city provide linear corridors for walking, jogging and bicycle riding. Various irrigation

districts own the canals, and any use of areas alongside the canals must have the approval of the owners of the canals. Issues to be addressed in using the canals include:

- The need to continue using the upper banks of the irrigation canals for ongoing regular maintenance.
- The need to prevent users from falling into the canal waters and suffering injury or drowning because they are not able to get out of the water.
- Type of trail materials that can withstand occasional use by maintenance vehicles.

The canal trail areas are currently generally open and accessible to the public, though they are usually signed to prevent access. In general, the flat upper bank areas are over 15' in width, which is sufficient for trail use. Hard packed crushed rock trail surfaces are recommended, since they are less expensive and would be easy to repair if damaged by canal maintenance vehicles. 30" tall fences are required to protect young users from falling into the adjacent canals. Pedestrian bridges will be required at regular intervals to allow users to access the trail on only one side of the canal corridor. The opposite side can be limited to maintenance equipment. Fences should be attractive so as to enhance the quality of the irrigation corridors. The pictures illustrate the attractive nature and possibilities of the irrigation canals in Harlingen.



NEEDS ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

Based on the assessments and input received, the following are the key facility needs in Harlingen.

Very High

- Sand volleyball courts - City currently has none
- Basketball/multi-purpose courts - Very limited supply throughout the city, and these courts provide locations for active sports
- All inclusive/destination play area - Harlingen currently has none, nor are there any within the region around Harlingen
- Trails - Key trail gaps remain, and the western area of the city currently has no trails
- Overall Parkland per capita - the city is currently deficient in this area
- Parkland in the western area of the city - City currently has none
- Quick soccer (Futsal) courts - Futsal is a modified form of soccer played with five players per side on a smaller, sometimes indoor, field or court. There are none currently in the city, and this is a fast growing and very popular version of soccer
- Automated irrigation systems in every park

High

- Multi-purpose flat fields - Additional fields needed to complete Soccer Complex and to provide places for football, lacrosse, cricket, kickball and other flat field activities
- Picnic areas - Needed in all parks, constant demand for facilities
- Pavilions - Needed in all parks, high demand throughout the year
- Splash pads - Only one in the city today. Popular and less expensive way to provide access to water activities for youth
- Practice backstops - To allow for baseball/softball practice as well as soccer/football practice
- Adequate size and quantity of restroom facilities in strategic park locations
- Additional rental facilities, both for large events as well as mid to smaller size for family sized events
- Additional monument signs to identify and help brand Harlingen's parks

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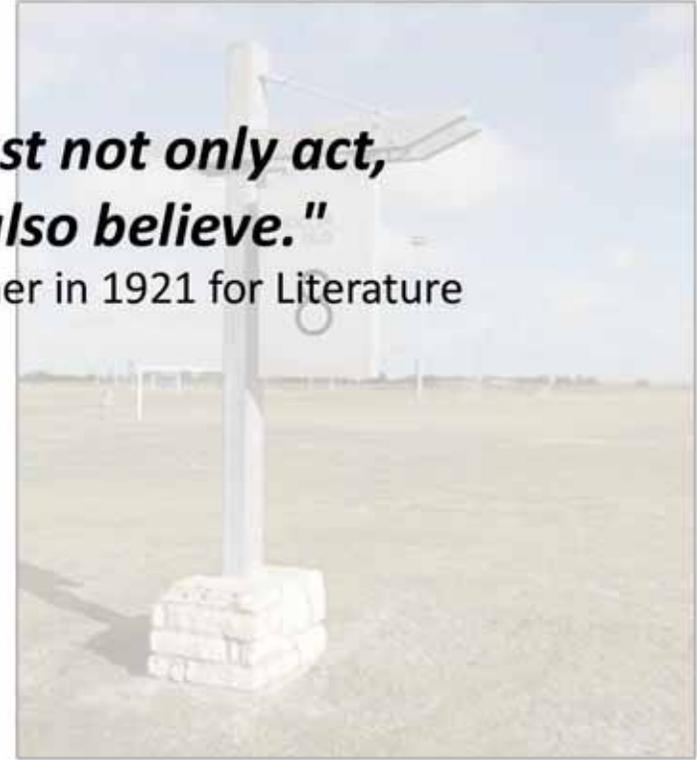
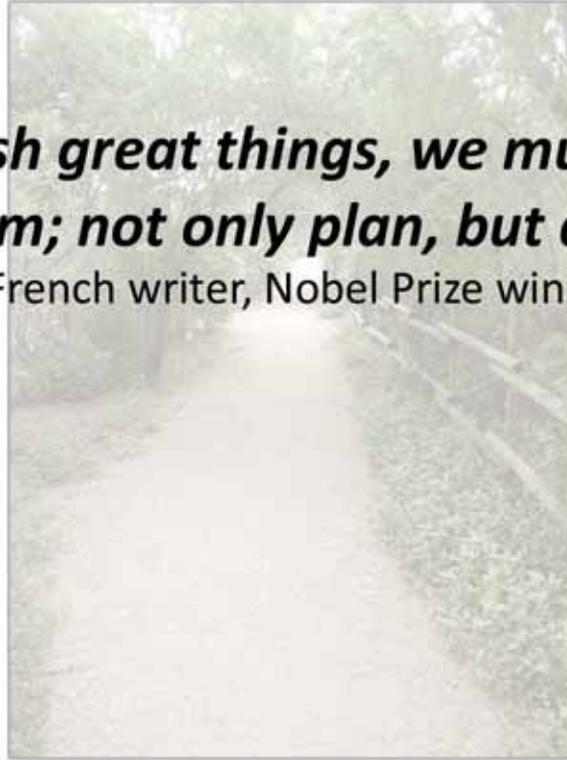
Recommendations of the Master Plan

Chapter 5



"To accomplish great things, we must not only act, but also dream; not only plan, but also believe."

~ Anatole France, French writer, Nobel Prize winner in 1921 for Literature



PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

The vision for the 2016 Parks Master Plan is to provide state of the art park, recreation, trail and open space facilities that enhance the city’s position as the premier place to live in the greater Rio Grande Valley region. Parks in Harlingen will preserve and enhance the city’s character.

Sustainability - Due to a better understanding today of the effects of pollution and over-development in a finite environment, the awareness of the importance of environmental stewardship is not a fad anymore; but rather regarded as a basic standard by most people today. Therefore, the City of Harlingen should commit to developing and operating in a sustainable manner.

Quality - Today’s young families are drawn to cities with state-of-the-art parks and facilities. These people expect to find amenities and facilities in cities similar to what they experienced in their prior communities. Attracting and retaining residents, as well as businesses to employ and serve such residents, will depend on providing high-quality parks and recreation facilities in Harlingen.

Beauty - However it is defined, all people seek to have access to beautiful surroundings and environments. Therefore, Harlingen should provide providing attractive places that can be enjoyed by residents of the city, whether they are visiting the park or driving by.

Harlingen’s parks, recreation, trails, and open space system is a vital part of what has and will continue to help Harlingen gain recognition as a great and sustainable place to live, work and play. In fact, it may be the most visible and tangible element of that elusive quality of life that all cities seek. This plan seeks to build upon what is already in place, and to develop a framework that can unify all parts of the city.

Key design points that should guide the design and enhancements of every existing or new park in the city are as follows:

- Every park should be considered as a green oasis in Harlingen - Parks

should be carefully sited so that they are prominent features in their respective neighborhoods, and should include the preservation of mature trees, new landscaping and interesting features that attract users to the park.

- Parks should follow a consistent citywide design theme - Fundamental items such as park signs, high quality pavilions with rock faced columns, and the preservation of existing vegetation and trees should be used in every park to create a consistent and recognizable park nomenclature that unites the parks in Harlingen.
- Where possible, each park should truly celebrate the history and culture of Harlingen - All parks in the city can incorporate historical plaques and features that allude to the area or neighborhood around the park or the circumstances that caused the park to be created.
- Every park should include features for a wide variety of park users - Park facilities should be multi-faceted, and should follow the guidelines for each park type presented in Chapter 3.
- Parks should be designed so as to reduce maintenance - Automatic irrigation systems should be a key component of every park, and in conjunction, each park should have native grasses and trees to reduce watering consumption. The use of treated effluent reuse water for irrigation purposes should be utilized in all parks where feasible.
- Shade should be incorporated from the onset into many features of every park - Playgrounds and basketball courts should be covered where feasible, and several covered picnic tables should be included in every park, no matter how small the park is.
- Bodies of water should be highly valued - Existing areas of water, whether in the form of ponds, small lakes or drainage canals should be preserved as a recreational asset. New parks built around water should be included in the system.
- Community input should be welcomed - Input from neighborhoods surrounding each new or renovated park should be included in the design of every park in the city.

RECOMMENDATION CATEGORIES

Based on the needs assessment developed in Chapter 4, a series of park improvements are recommended for Harlingen. These recommendations address the need for the development of new parks and trails, as well as general improvements to existing parks. These recommendations should be implemented over the general life of this plan, which covers the next 5 to 10 years. The recommended improvements fall into four general categories:

- 1. Improvements to Existing Parks** - Making key improvements to existing parks throughout the city.
- 2. Trail Development** - Developing a citywide connected trails system based on the recommendations of the city's adopted 2010 Trails Master Plan.
- 3. Land Acquisition and New Park Development** - Acquire land for future park development.
- 4. Indoor Facility Needs** - Key indoor facility recommendations.

1. PARK IMPROVEMENTS AND RENOVATIONS

The input received from Harlingen's residents have made it clear that improvements to existing parks are a key priority. Facilities in some existing parks continue to age and are in need of repair. Renovations and additions to existing parks is a very high priority of this master plan.

In addition to improvements to existing parks, there are also general renovations that can be made to all parks to provide a uniform "Harlingen" level of service and appearance. General renovations that can be made include:

- Add play areas to parks that do not have modern play structures.
- Add shade structures over existing playgrounds when feasible. Increase shade in all parks by planting more trees where practical.
- Improve landscaping and overall beautification in parks by adding

native trees and grasses. Native materials also conserve water.

- Install automated irrigation systems in all parks around the active use zones (athletic fields, picnic areas, playground areas, open play/practice areas).
- Ensure all improvements meet ADA requirements.
- Improve sidewalks both within parks and in areas connecting parks to adjacent neighborhoods.
- Ensure that safety surfacing/fall zone materials around play areas and other play features are adequate and meet industry guidelines and standards.
- Address areas with poor drainage within existing parks.
- Public art has tremendous potential to contribute to the landscaping of a park. Having prominent art in key locations will set Harlingen apart as a city that appreciates quality of life.
- Wi-Fi access to the internet in parks is popular in many cities. Harlingen should consider providing Wi-Fi hot spots in larger community parks if feasible.

The following recommendations are made for the existing parks in the system. These are preliminary master plan level recommendations, and are intended only to define the magnitude of the improvements for each park. Preliminary cost estimates at a master plan level for the improvements to each park are also included, and area intended to establish the relative "order of magnitude" cost range for each park site. Each park should be further programmed and master planned as it enters the design phase, and new updated cost projections should be developed. Extensive area resident and user group input should be included in the design process for each park.

The recommendations on the following pages are based on assessments recently performed by city staff.

Recommended Improvements to Existing Parks				
Park Name	Area of the City	Potential Improvements	Potential Cost Range*	Priority
Arroyo Park	South	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lighting for two existing unlit youth athletic fields ▪ Add automated Irrigation System ▪ Add two volleyball courts in open space area ▪ Add additional parking ▪ New bleachers for all four athletic fields ▪ Add a football/soccer field ▪ Add a large rental pavilion with restrooms 	\$500,000 to \$750,000	High High High High High High High
Bonham Park	East	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Replace inclusive playground equipment and safety surfacing (consider artificial turf) ▪ Add trailhead sign and pre-workout equipment to the proposed 25th Street Trail project that is scheduled to open later this year ▪ Add proposed parking area ▪ Add automated Irrigation system ▪ Add medium sized pavilion and restrooms 	\$400,000 to \$600,000	High High High Medium High Medium
CB Wood Park	Central / South	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Add two covered picnic gazebos ▪ Add-Restrooms ▪ Add parking area ▪ Add automated irrigation system 	\$500,000	High High Medium High
Lake Harlingen	Citywide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improve/overlay the existing asphalt trail, and extend the existing trail to complete the one mile loop around the lake ▪ Add outdoor fitness/exercise equipment along trail ▪ Improve lighting along trail 	\$200,000 to \$250,000	High High High
Dixieland Park	Citywide / West	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Install automated irrigation system ▪ Add lights to parking lot adjacent to pavilion ▪ Develop lighted multipurpose trail within the park ▪ Extend trail along Arroyo Colorado to existing McKelvey Park trail (cost included in trails recommendations) ▪ Renovate disc golf course ▪ Overlay parking areas 	\$500,000 to \$1,000,000	Medium Medium High High Medium Medium
Gutierrez Park	Citywide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Install lights in the gazebo and trees ▪ Add automated irrigation system ▪ Add a restroom facility to encourage more use of pavilion and playground for private events 	\$250,000 to \$300,000	High Medium Medium
Hunter Park	North	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Replace toddler playground and surfacing ▪ Replace covered picnic gazebo ▪ Add drinking fountain ▪ Add automated irrigation system 	\$140,000 to \$200,000	High Medium Medium Medium
Lon C. Hill Park	Citywide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Construct all inclusive play area in the park ▪ Add volleyball courts ▪ Add monument sign ▪ Construct large pavilion for events, festivals and private parties ▪ Construct asphalt walking/jogging trail (3/8th mile) ▪ Replace roof at swimming pool building 	\$1,500,000 to \$2,000,000	High High Medium High Medium High

Recommended Improvements to Existing Parks				
Park Name	Area of the City	Potential Improvements	Potential Cost Range*	Priority
McKelvey Park	South	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Add a monument sign/message board to promote city events and improve overall park aesthetics Add additional parking and overlay existing parking Renovate all electrical for special events Develop a bar-b-que area Add outdoor exercise equipment to compliment trail Fence pavilion for rental use Develop a more formal amphitheater 	\$500,000 to \$2,000,000	High High High Medium Medium Medium Medium
Pendleton Park	North/ Citywide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overlay parking lots Replace roof and insulation on pool building, install ventilation system on pool building Extend existing asphalt trail by 8/10th mile throughout the park. Add lights and exercise equipment along trail Connect Pendleton Park to the 25th Street Trail Light basketball court Construct a tennis pro shop and championship court to host tournaments Add splash pad Add football/soccer field 	\$1,000,000 to \$3,000,000	High High High High Medium Medium Medium Medium
Rangerville Park	South	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve the existing parking lot Construct an adult baseball field with irrigation and lights to accommodate the popular sport within the city Consider upgrading/replacing the pavilion to a more modern style with steel security fencing to beautify the park 	\$350,000	High High Medium
Harlingen Soccer Complex	Citywide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overlay existing fields with topsoil to improve playability. Develop remainder of fields from master plan as well as support facilities and parking Improve existing walking trail (curbs and decomposed granite) 	\$2,500,000 to \$4,000,000	Very High Very High Very High
Tom Wilson Sports Complex	Citywide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional parking with lights (220 spaces near youth athletic fields), overlay existing parking Extend crushed granite trail 8/10th mile, and add two covered picnic gazebos 	\$500,000 to \$700,000	Medium Medium
Vestal Park	North	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve parking lot, and add shading for bleachers, umpires and players Add a new 1/2 mile crushed granite trail Add new playground equipment and surfacing Add an entrance sign and lights to field. 	\$300,000 to \$500,000	High Medium High High
Victor Park	South / West	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At existing football field, grade and add sod and add new bleachers (a total of 8 ten-row bleachers) Replace concrete deck and filtration system at pool (close to 50 years in age and on the verge of failure) Add new parking (75 to 100 spaces) and overlay existing parking Add automated irrigation system Add two covered picnic gazebos Construct a new concession building Replace lights at Tennis Court 	\$1,500,000 to \$2,000,000	High High High High Medium Medium High High
Windsor Park	Central	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Add a restroom facility to allow for extended day use of the park Replace playground and surfacing with new City Standard equipment. Automated irrigation system using irrigation canal water. Construct two new picnic shelters with Bar-B-Que Add sidewalks extending to amenities 	\$500,000	Medium High Medium Medium High

High = Within 5 years; Medium = 5 to 10 years; Low = 10+ years

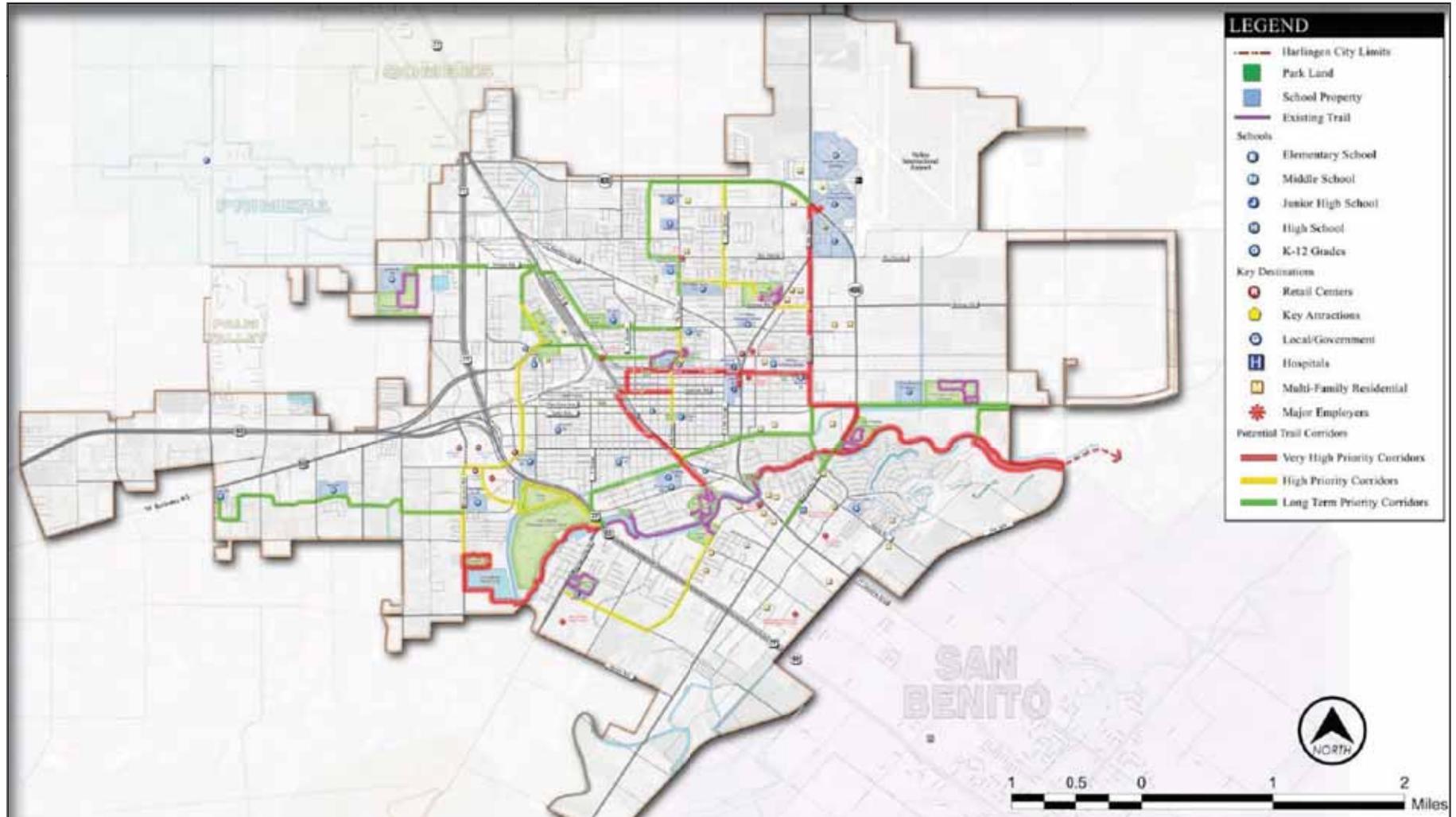
*Costs shown are at a pre-design, master planning level and will vary as more detailed master planning and design occurs.

2. TRAIL DEVELOPMENT

Similar to other communities across Texas, trails were consistently ranked as a high priority among the residents of Harlingen. Furthermore, the city developed a Trails Master Plan in 2010 with detailed recommendations to connect neighborhoods and key destinations. This plan also recommends implementing the high priority actions of the Trails Master Plan.

The very high priority recommendations for trails include:

- Trails along the Arroyo Colorado
- Jackson Street to Bonham Elementary, connecting to Lake Harlingen
- Centennial/Thicket Rail-Trail Corridor
- Connection to Soccer Complex
- West Harlingen drainage corridor trail

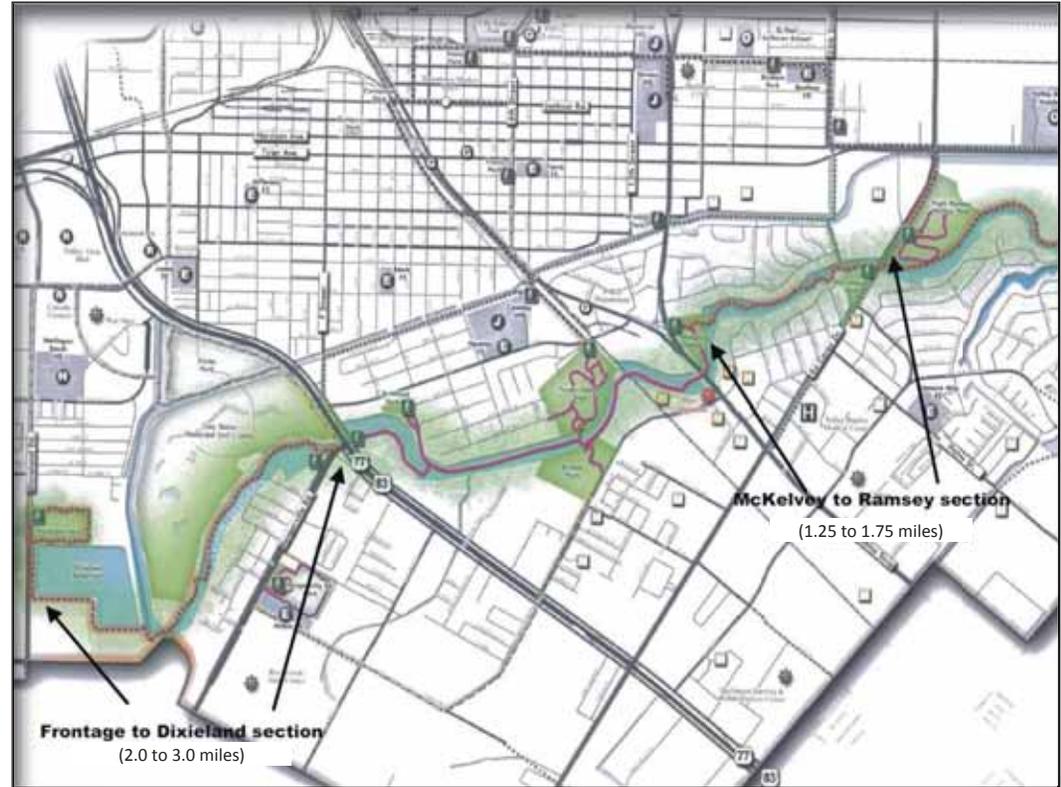


High priority recommendations from the 2010 Trails Master Plan are highlighted in red

The first phase of trail development will be to complete the 9+ mile trail along the Arroyo Colorado. There are two pieces to be constructed in order to complete the continuous linear trail.

Develop trail between Dixieland Park and IH 69 - Prepare schematic level engineering plans and cost estimates. Meet with TXDOT regarding next scheduled enhancement grant project cycle and determine key areas in which to make future trail applications stronger. Consider alternative alignments and develop trail as a high priority. The trail is estimated to cost between \$2.0 and \$3.0 million.

Develop trail between Hugh Ramsey Park and the current terminus of the trail at McKelvey Park - Prepare schematic level engineering plans and cost estimates. Submit as trail grant application for funding. Develop trail as a high priority. The trail is estimated to cost between \$1.5 and \$2.0 million. Land or easement acquisition may be required.

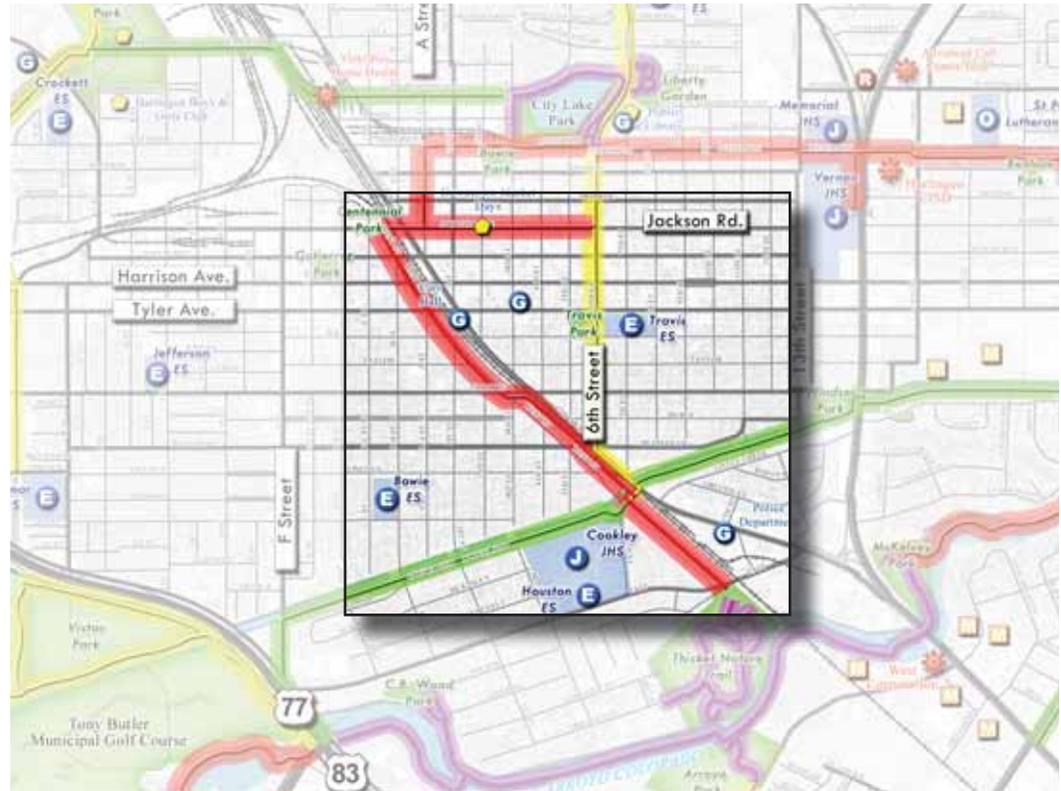


Jackson Street to Bonham Elementary, connecting to Lake Harlingen - This corridor runs through the central area of Harlingen, connecting the 25th Street Corridor to the Centennial-Thicket Rail-Trail on the west side of downtown. This corridor provides connectivity to downtown and other destinations in the central area including several schools, the Harlingen Public Library, several parks including City Lake Park and the Jackson Street District.

The corridor is recommended to be a mix of on-street sidewalks, rail-trail, and off-street along a drainage corridor. The western portion of the corridor, along A Street, will be an on-street sidewalk from Jackson Street to Jefferson Street. Along Jefferson Street, the Union Pacific railroad runs parallel, and space limitations will require parts of the trail to be located in railroad right-of-way. This will continue into and through the central sector of the corridor. On the east side of 77 Sunshine Strip, a drainage corridor buffers the railroad, so the trail could be located in this drainage corridor and not encroach on the railroad right-of-way.



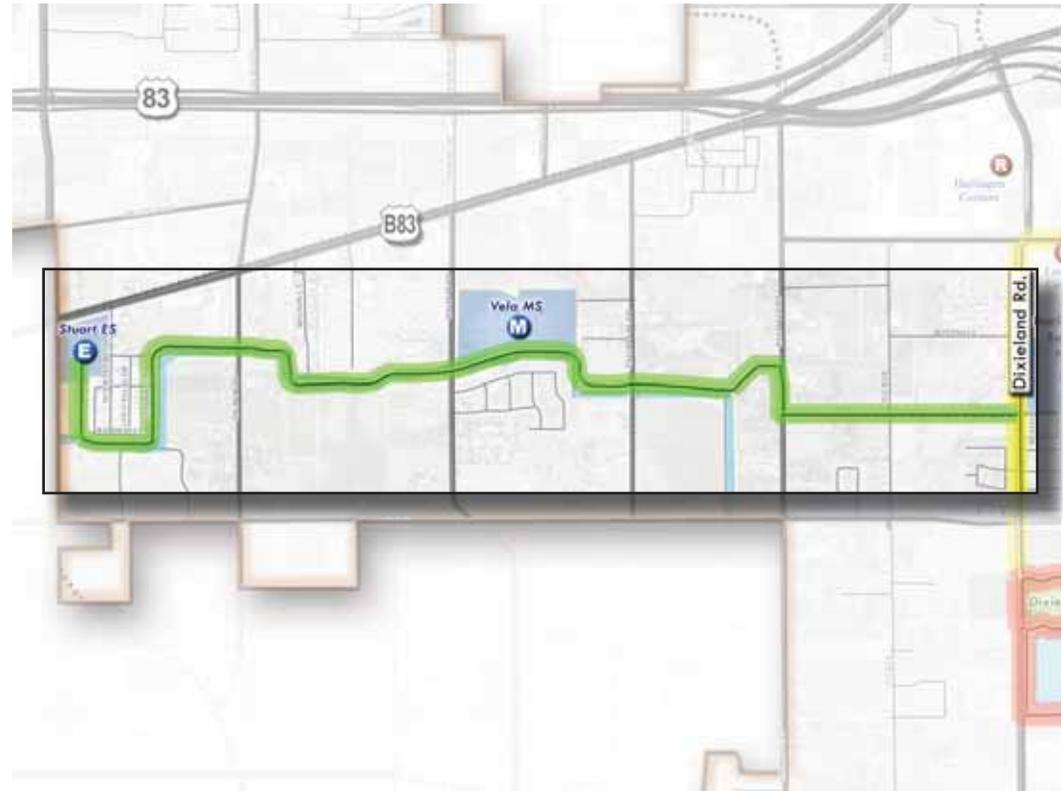
Centennial/Thicket Rail-Trail Corridor - The Centennial/Thicket Corridor runs along the Union Pacific Railroad from Centennial Park near downtown Harlingen to Thicket Nature Area near the Arroyo Colorado. This corridor will provide a strong connection between downtown Harlingen and the Arroyo Colorado Trail (via trails in the Thicket Nature Area), improving access between the areas. The challenge in implementing this trail, as will all rail-trails, will be working with Union Pacific Railroad to design a trail that would safely accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists in the railroad right-of-way.



Connection to Soccer Complex - It is recommended to develop a trail along the north side of Harrison Avenue, connecting the recently completed 25th Street Trail Corridor to the Harlingen Soccer Complex. This corridor can also connect to Hugh Ramsey Nature Park and the Arroyo Colorado trail along Ed Carey Drive.



West Harlingen Drainage Corridor - The west side of Harlingen currently has no existing trails. There is an opportunity to develop a trail along a drainage corridor. This corridor connects several existing neighborhoods as well as Stuart Elementary, Vela Middle School and Harlingen South High School. The trail is proposed to travel from Beckham Road to Dixieland Road, and will be approximately 3 miles long.



3. LAND ACQUISITION TO ADDRESS UPCOMING PARK NEEDS

Harlingen has a significant supply of parkland, and ranks as one of the highest in availability of parkland and open space of any city in the Rio Grande Valley. However, some growing areas of the city lack access to parkland. Without land to preserve or on which to build recreation facilities, Harlingen cannot have any future parks. This plan recommends that the city try to maintain a ratio similar to what it has today, but improve the access to parks for future residents that current residents have as growth occurs within the city. This will require proactive land acquisition on the part of staff and the City Commission. Acquiring land for future parks should be a priority, even if those parks will not be built for years to come, while at the same time it is a priority to maintain what we already have.

Keeping in mind that parks are a critical component of how the city is perceived, land acquisition should not always target the least expensive piece of land. Rather, the specific needs of the area, the citizens that it will serve, and the natural characteristics of the site should all be considered when land is acquired for park use.

Land is also a finite resource, and efforts to acquire that land today at a lower cost will pay off in the future. If the location of the park site is known, then the entire neighborhood can be planned around it.

Smaller parks should be planned for in every new neighborhood or grouping of neighborhoods in Harlingen. Sites should be selected that allow easy walking access within a few blocks and without crossing any major streets. Most importantly, the growth of the city is expected to continue so acquisition of future neighborhood parks is needed. There are five key areas that are in need of future parkland in Harlingen.

1. Southwest Harlingen - The area south of Highway 83 and west of Palm Court Drive is also lacking in parkland. One opportunity in this area is the develop a school-park adjacent to Stuart Place Elementary. There currently is a walking track, a soccer field, two basketball courts, a playground and swings on the site. The city portion could be expanded to the south on the vacant property along Stuart Place Road near the drainage canal which totals approximately 4.5 acres. The cityportion of the site should

be publicly accessible to all residents during non-school hours. This area also has several vacant or agricultural parcels of land that could be used as a park site if a partnership agreement cannot be established with Harlingen CISD for a school-park. A second neighborhood park is also needed in this area because of the significant amount of residential growth that has occurred over the past several years. The second park should be approximately 10 to 15 acres in size (see #4 below).

2. Northwest Harlingen - The area north of IH 2 (US 83), south of Wilson Road, and west of Tom Wilson Sports Complex is lacking in parkland. There are still several large parcels of land both within the city limits and Harlingen's ETJ that are undeveloped or used as agriculture. Many of these opportunities are located close to the existing residential developments such as along FM 3195 or Dilworth Avenue. The park site should be approximately 5 to 10 acres in size. There are also drainage canals that flow through this area. Establishing trails along these canals can link all residents within this area to the future park site.

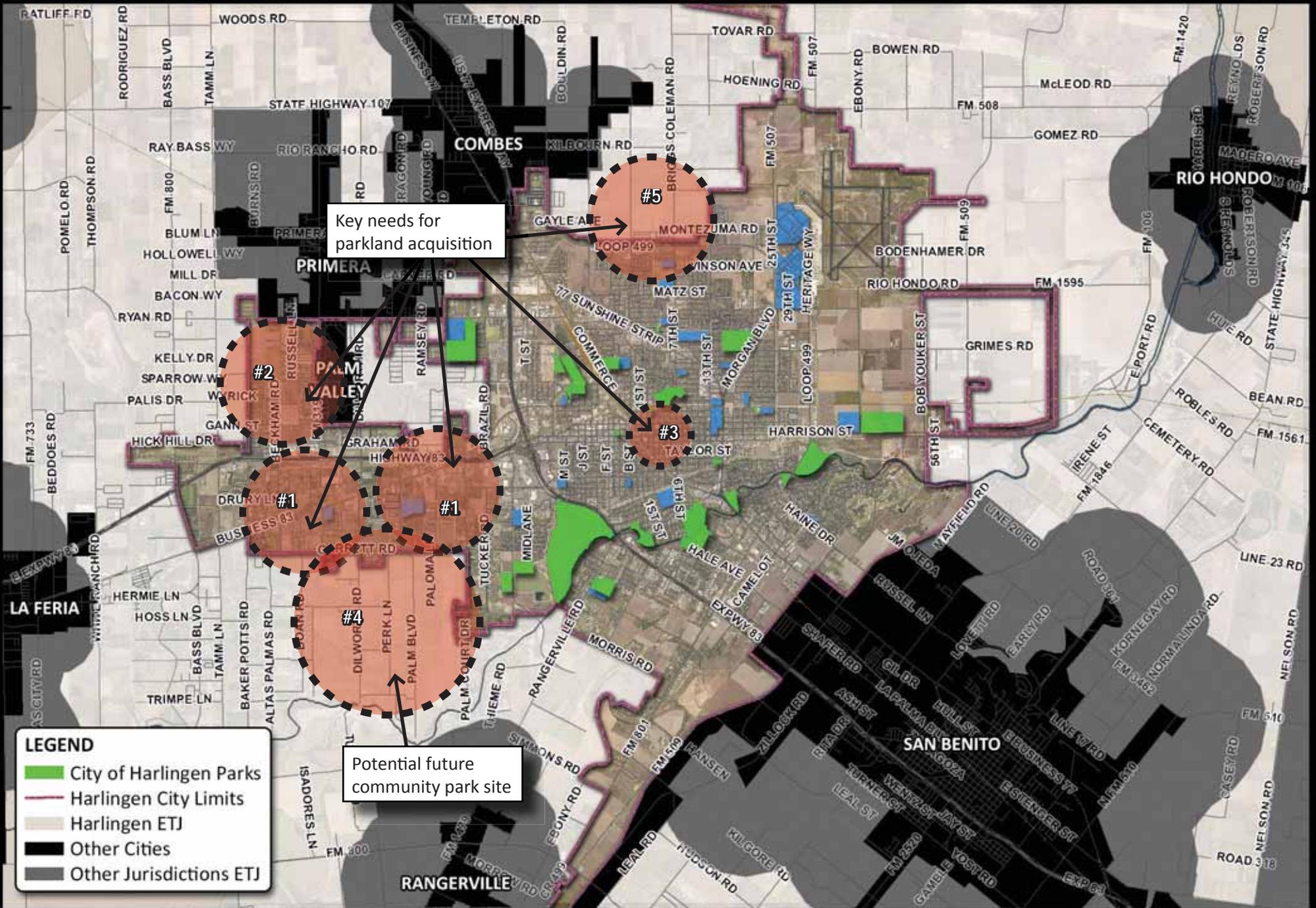
3. Pocket parks downtown - As the downtown/core area of the city grows, opportunities for additional small pocket parks should be considered. These smaller parks can mainly provide small play features, shade, seating areas, and public art where appropriate.

4. Southwest Community Park - Longer term, the southwest area of Harlingen, where extreme future growth may occur, should include a larger community parks. While development may not occur for another 10 to 20 years, acquisition should be considered sooner while still available.

5. North Harlingen - A neighborhood park is needed in this area. School/park facilities at Means Elementary or the acquisition of 5 to 10 acres in this area is recommended.

The map on the following page shows the key areas in need of parkland acquisition.

Parkland can be acquired through the fee-simple purchase of land, through donations of land, or via a required set-aside of land for parks and trails (if the City adopts a ParkInad Dedication ordinance).



Future Parkland Needs

Harlingen Parks and Recreation Master Plan



GRAPHIC SCALE



4. INDOOR RECREATION NEEDS

Indoor recreation programming is a key component of most modern city's recreation system. These programs increase fitness and allow a city to diversify what it offers. Indoor facilities are a critical component of quality of life and citizen fitness in Harlingen.

Conduct feasibility study for an indoor rec center - Will help determine demand for the facility, potential cost to operate, potential charges to residents, and look at models to consider (e.g. joint with another entity, joint with another city use, etc.). The projected cost is approximately \$50,000. This should be considered a medium priority, and should be conducted within the next five years.

Develop indoor recreation center based on findings of the feasibility study - Consider TPWD grant application and private donations. Develop as a medium priority, and consider bond funding to help develop the facility. The projected cost is \$7,500,000 to \$10,000,000 for an initial phase.

The city currently has no public facility for extensive fitness or indoor recreation programming. A citywide, state of the art recreation center will provide a healthful and attractive environment in which every person in Harlingen will have the opportunity to enjoy activities of a social, creative and/or physical nature. This would be the first facility of this type for Harlingen, where people and families of all ages can recreate together. A large, citywide indoor recreation facility is projected to be needed within the next three to five years.

The recreation center should range from 30,000 to 50,000 square feet in size. It should offer modern amenities such as fitness/weight room, multipurpose classrooms, gymnasiums, walking track, dance studio room, locker rooms, and possible outdoor aquatic components such as a splash pad or water park. The center could be developed as a joint venture with a private entity. Therefore, the City's estimated cost should be in the range of \$7,500,000 to \$10,000,000.

Add a Community Center at Pendleton Park - As Harlingen's most popular park, a community center building at Pendleton could serve much of the city's population and generate rental revenue for the Parks Department. The projected cost of this medium priority facility may range from \$500,000 to \$1,500,000 depending on the size and amenities in the building.



Typical amenities that can be found in a modern, state of the art, recreation center

IMPLEMENTATION AND ACTION PLAN

The following items comprise the major priority recommendations of the 2016 Harlingen Parks and Recreation Master Plan. Illustrations included with each of these items are intended to convey the essence of each recommendation, but are not specific concepts or actual plans. Costs that are shown are also pre-design, and are based on staff experience with similar efforts. Construction costs should be monitored, and changes to the Action Plan costs should be revised as costs fluctuate. Detailed project costs, based on actual designs should be prepared as each recommendation begins to be implemented.

Prioritization - Actions are divided into three categories, based on the level of need:

- **High Priority Items** - To be initiated or completed within the next two to five years.
- **Medium Priority Items** - To be initiated or completed within the next five to ten years.
- **Long Term Priority Items** - To be initiated as opportunities occur, or beyond the immediate 10 year timeframe of this master plan.

Key implementation steps are listed on the table on the following page, and consist of the Action Plan for this Parks and Recreation Master Plan. The following should be considered when reviewing the Action Plan:

- **Sequence** - The sequence is based directly on the recommended importance and need for each action. However, some actions may take longer to occur. In that case, other actions may be easier to accomplish sooner, but should not diminish the need for higher priority actions.
- **Funding Possibilities** - The sale of certificates of obligation may generate funding, such as a Quality of Life Bond. Other potential funding sources are noted in the table, but are not secured. Rather, they should be considered as possibilities to also pursue.
- **Projected Costs** - The projected costs per item are intended to

establish an order of magnitude cost range. These estimates are made prior to any designs being developed, and will vary as more detailed design occurs. Costs that are shown are also pre-design, and are based on staff experience with similar types of facilities and efforts.

- **Suggested Timeframe** - The suggested timeframes are approximate and are intended to establish a sequence for all actions. The prioritization is intended to guide staff and city leaders, and any item may be initiated sooner than recommended if unique circumstances or opportunities arise.

Action Plan - City of Harlingen Parks and Recreation Master Plan						
Priority	Action	Area Impacted	Estimated Cost Range*		Potential Timeframe	Potential Funding Source
			Low	High		
Very High	Identify funding sources and priorities for critical initial phase of existing park improvements (as established by city staff, potential improvements shown on pages 58 and 59).	Citywide	\$4,000,000	\$5,000,000	2016-2020	General fund, bonds, 4B funding, donations, VBLF, CDBG, TPWD
Very High	Complete the Arroyo Colorado Trail as the premier trail corridor in the Rio Grande Valley from Dixieland Park to Hugh Ramsey Park (creates a significant visitation or attraction for relocation to Harlingen)	Citywide	\$2,500,000	\$5,000,000	2016-2020	General fund, bonds, 4B funding, TxDOT enhancements, donations
Very High	Establish land use patterns for undeveloped areas adjacent to the Arroyo (planning effort but impacts key park and open space feature)	Citywide	\$0 (by city staff)	\$0 (by city staff)	2016-2017	General fund, bonds, 4B, grants, TxGLO, TCEQ
High	Develop Phase II of the Harlingen Soccer Complex (creates a regional complex in a fast growing sport)	Citywide	\$2,500,000	\$3,000,000	2016-2020	General fund, bonds, 4B, grants, donations, TPWD
High	Destination/inclusive play area (located in Victor, Pendelton, Lon C. Hill Park, or Wilson Sports Complex)	Citywide	\$250,000	\$500,000	2016-2020	General fund, 4B, bonds, donations, grants, VBLF, TPWD
High	Improve Hugh Ramsey Park as a major birding and wildlife attraction	Citywide	\$200,000	\$400,000	2016-2020	General fund, 4B, bonds, grants, donations, TxGLO, TPWD
High	Work with Harlingen CISD to create “school parks” in West Harlingen and in North Harlingen	West	\$500,000	\$1,500,000	2016-2020	General fund, bonds, 4B, grants, donations, TPWD
High	Reorganize and improve Lon C. Hill Park (alter road pattern to create a signature park)	Citywide	\$1,000,000	\$2,000,000	2016-2020	General fund, bonds, 4B, grants, donations, CDBG, TPWD
High to Medium	Additional high priority trail segments (Jackson Street corridor, West Harlingen trail, Commerce Street trail, connection to Soccer Complex)	Citywide	\$4,000,000	\$8,000,000	2020-2025	General fund, bonds, 4B, grants, donations, TPWD, VBLF

Action Plan - City of Harlingen Parks and Recreation Master Plan						
Priority	Action	Area Impacted	Estimated Cost Range*		Potential Timeframe	Potential Funding Source
			Low	High		
Medium	Conduct an indoor recreation center feasibility review to address indoor recreation needs (the city has no true recreation center for indoor programming)	Citywide	\$50,000	\$75,000	2017-2020	General fund, bonds, 4B, grants, donations
Medium	Develop additional high priority and other medium priority improvements to existing parks (as established by city staff, potential improvements shown on pages 58 and 59)	Citywide	\$4,000,000	\$5,000,000	2020-2025	General fund, bonds, 4B, grants, donations, TPWD, CDBG
Medium	Develop a nature center facility	Citywide	\$1,000,000	\$3,000,000	2020-2025 or beyond	General fund, bonds, 4B, grants, donations, TPWD, TxGLO
Long Term	Construct an indoor recreation center (based on the findings of the feasibility review)	Citywide	\$7,500,000	\$10,000,000	2020-2025 or beyond	General fund, bonds, 4B, grants, donations, TPWD, VBLF

* Amounts shown will vary and are shown to establish an order of magnitude level of expenditure. Detailed design recommended to determine final costs and funding required.

Abbreviations

TPWD - Texas Park’s Wildlife Department

TxGlo - Texas General Land Office

TCEQ - Texas Commission of Environmental Quality

VBLF - Valley Baptist Legacy Foundation

TxDot - Texas Department of Transportation, Transportation Alternative Program

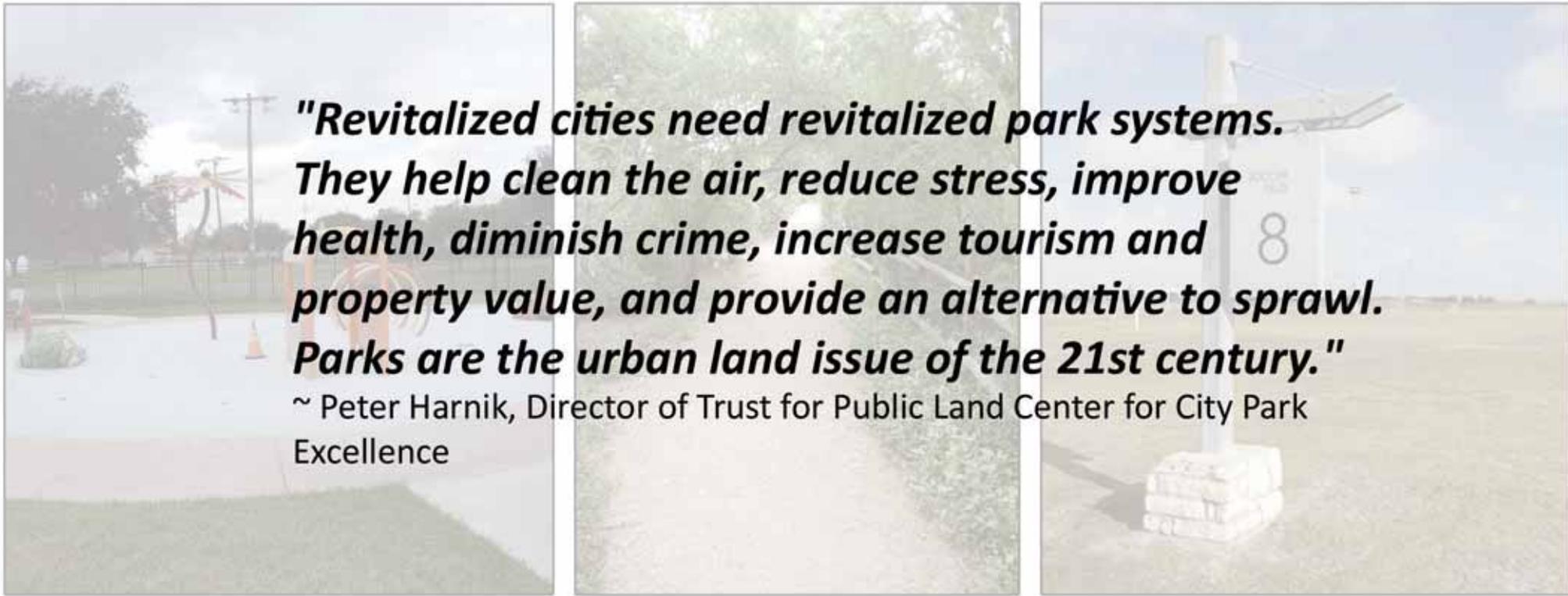
CDBG - Community Development Block Grant





Implementation Strategies

Chapter 6



"Revitalized cities need revitalized park systems. They help clean the air, reduce stress, improve health, diminish crime, increase tourism and property value, and provide an alternative to sprawl. Parks are the urban land issue of the 21st century."

~ Peter Harnik, Director of Trust for Public Land Center for City Park Excellence



FUNDING STRATEGIES FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

Funding strategies will differ for each type of facility. However, the majority of the funding required to address the city’s park needs must come from local sources, primarily bond funding and sales tax revenue. While improvements to existing parks and most sidewalks can be built with local funds, other park, open space and trail projects may be able to contend for federal and state funds. This section provides brief descriptions of these funding implementation assistance opportunities.

Key City-Generated Funding Sources

General Fund Expenditures - These are primarily used for minor improvements to existing parks and operations. Some funding should be set aside annually to cover upgrades. This plan recommends that an amount of at least \$40,000 to \$50,000 should be budgeted annually as an allowance for general improvements and replacement costs.

Sales Tax Revenue - Sales tax revenue through the city’s 4B fund is now used for community facilities such as parks, trails and recreation buildings. This option should continue to be considered for projects with significant community-wide benefit. Recreational features with significant impact on quality of life will make Harlingen a much more attractive and economically viable location to live, work and play.

Voter Approved Bond Funds - Recent bond issues in other Texas cities for park and open space preservation needs have been successful, and point to a continued desire for increased spending on quality of life items in the fast growing cities of the area. A bond referendum to fund many of the larger development items recommended by this master plan should be considered over the next five to ten years.

Park Facility Funding through the Parkland Dedication Ordinance - This type of ordinance can provide a vehicle for development of parks, open space and trails through private developers as land is developed in Harlingen. Specific considerations for the ordinance are discussed in a subsequent section of this chapter. However, the building of neighborhood based park facilities by developers and Homeowner associations should be encouraged.

Tax Increment Finance (TIF) and Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone (TIRZ) Districts - A TIF District is a zone where certain property tax revenues generated in the district are reinvested back into the district through development of infrastructure. TIFs operate on the idea that public investment helps stimulate and grow property values, justifying the reinvestment of property taxes back into the district generating the revenue. The city has three TIF reinvestment zones: Zone #1 Loop 499, Zone #2 FM 509, and Zone #3 Spur 54. If feasible, explore the use of TIF/ TIRZ funds to address needs identified in this plan.

Key Grant Funding Sources

Grants can provide a significant source of additional funding for parks, but should not be considered as the primary source for park construction.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department - Texas Recreation and Parks Account (TRPA) is the primary source for parks grants in Texas, and in addition, provides funding for recreational trails. Up to a 50 percent match can be obtained to help fund new parks and trail facilities. Grant applications that stress joint funding, and support from two or more local entities may have a greater chance of contending for the TRPA grants.

Transportation Alternatives Program - Under the new Federal policy, MAP-21, the previous Transportation Enhancements, Safe Routes to School and Recreational Trails programs are combined into one. Under this new program, 2 percent of federal highway funds are reserved for projects defined as transportation alternatives projects (TAP) such as trails. TXDOT continues to periodically issue calls for new projects, and Harlingen should aggressively pursue this funding when it is available to build new trails.

Indoor Recreation Grants from TPWD - These grants are available to local governments for the construction or renovation of indoor recreation facilities. This assistance is in the form of 50 percent matching grant funds up to \$750,000. Local governments must apply, permanently dedicate the building for public recreational use and assume responsibility for operation and maintenance.

Environmental Protection Agency - The EPA can provide funding for projects with money collected in pollution settlements, or with funding targeted at wetland and habitat preservation or reclamation.

Foundation and Company Grants - These can assist in direct funding for projects, while others exist to help citizen efforts get established with small seed funds or technical and publicity assistance.

Grants for Greenways – This is a national listing that provides descriptions of a broad spectrum of both general and specific groups who provide technical and financial support for greenway interests.

Partnerships

Partnerships with Volunteer Groups – Partnerships with volunteer groups can be helpful when constructing trails or playground equipment. Their effort can be used as part of the required match for many grants such as the Transportation Alternatives Program. There are a variety of sources for volunteers including: user groups, local residents, corporate community service initiatives, and business and civic support groups.

Parks Foundation - Parks foundations are non-profit organizations and another source for volunteers. People can make tax deductible donations to a foundation, which in turn provides financial support and volunteer time to a city's parks system. Parks foundations often assist with physical improvements to a park or support recreational programming. They essentially help fill the gap between what needs to be done and what a parks department can afford to do.

Joint Planning with Harlingen CISD - Establish joint planning review sessions with the Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District to allow for coordination of facilities and possible pooling of resources for a partnership in acquiring land for future schools and parks.

Establish a formal process and agreements for working directly and continuously with the Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District, so as to acquire lands for neighborhood and family parks in conjunction with school district property acquisitions.

Joint Planning with Cameron County - County trails and parks provide enormous benefits to the residents of Harlingen, and the city should continue to actively participate and provide funding to help cost share nearby facilities. Active joint planning with Cameron County for areas near the city should be considered as part of ongoing activities of the department. Review sessions with Cameron County allow for coordination of facilities and possible pooling of resources to jointly develop park and trail facilities.

POLICIES AND ORDINANCES

Parkland Dedication Ordinance - This type of ordinance is used by many cities, and is now generally not considered onerous by the development community, but rather is welcomed as a method to help fund smaller parks in a timely manner. A city's parkland dedication ordinance provides an important mechanism to ensure that adequate parkland is available when new development occurs by requiring land or cash in lieu of land for new residential developments in the city. Harlingen should consider adding a parkland dedication ordinance.

Trail Development Ordinance – A trail development ordinance is usually a component of a Parkland Dedication Ordinance. Similar ordinances have been enacted in other cities in Texas, and have proven successful in helping to get trails constructed. Often the city will fund regional trails and trailhead development, and then require complete developer construction of key trail segments that fall within their property limits. Credits for landscaping, pavement, or other infrastructure elements could be given in return for trail construction outside of Harlingen's 2010 Trails Master Plan. A key point to consider is that most developments will add trails automatically; therefore, such a mandatory trail development ordinance only serves to create a level playing field between the many developments that include trails and those that will build them only if required to do so.

Other Policy Recommendations

Establish a City Ordinance that requires single loaded streets along future



neighborhood parks. Single loaded roads allows for accessible parks that are safe and inviting. Safety is generally achieved by the informal surveillance provided by the residents overlooking the park.

Establish a City Ordinance that mandates the donation of floodplain lands along creek corridors. Such land is not developable yet provides habitat and corridors of movement for fauna and the opportunity for use as open space, greenways and trails.

Establish a formal process and agreements for working directly and continuously with the other city departments that can assist in acquiring parkland or in jointly developing facilities.

Pro-actively search for parkland to target for acquisition over the next five years. Include Harlingen’s ETJ in this search.

Endorse the park to population ratios established by this plan to guide the acquisition and development of parks in all sectors of the City. These are 1.5 acres per 1,000 population for neighborhood parks and 5 acres per 1,000 population for community parks.

Endorse the creation of linear park corridors that bisect and link parts of the city. Use the corridors identified in the city’s Trails Master Plan and in this plan. Establish standards for developing land adjacent to linear park corridors. These can include helping to fund linear parks, providing pedestrian connections to the parks, minimum amounts of landscaping along those corridors, and signage regulations adjacent to or within the linear park corridors.

Ensure that adequate maintenance personnel is provided to take care of parkland in the city. Expect and provide an exceptional level of care for high visibility park corridors.

Endorse the need for the acquisition and preservation of open space preserves throughout the city. Consider acquiring these lands in conjunction with needed park areas.

Direct city staff to pursue alternative methods of funding park system and programming improvement such as partnerships with nongovernmental entities, grant funding sources, establishing “Friends of…” organizations, and contracting out programs or operations. Consider these and other methods only where feasible and financially sound.

BUDGET LEVELS

Budget Levels – The budget for parks and recreation in 2014 was \$2,877,325 (does not include Library Services or Harlingen Field which also fall under the Public Services Department). For a current projected population of 67,000 residents, per capita expenditures are approximately \$43 per resident of the city. This is slightly below the average of the per capita expenditures by other similar cities in the region. Spending by other surrounding cities is as follows:

- Brownsville, approximately \$30.39 per capita
- McAllen, approximately \$80.69 per capita
- Edinburg, approximately \$65.93 per capita
- Mission, approximately \$34.02 per capita
- Laredo, approximately \$51.24 per capita

City of Harlingen Park Maintenance Budget Comparison, 2008-2014						
	FY 08-09	FY 09-10	FY 10-11	FY 11-12	FY 12-13	FY 13-14
Parks Service	\$155,850	\$152,770	\$148,720	\$167,076	\$173,052	\$179,575
Parks	\$1,556,536	\$1,685,898	\$1,582,731	\$2,362,671	\$2,362,671	\$1,314,712
Harlingen Field	\$37,704	\$46,603	\$40,603	\$31,757	\$31,757	\$43,468
Park Maintenance	\$239,906	\$433,048	\$438,347	\$464,636	\$464,636	\$476,449
Recreation	\$507,975	\$510,183	\$506,941	\$388,214	\$388,214	\$399,478
Swimming Pool	\$237,663	\$254,173	\$253,584	\$250,501	\$249,052	\$256,627
Pendelton Pool	\$267,969	\$235,586	\$225,789	\$292,227	\$260,347	\$250,484
TOTAL	\$3,003,603	\$3,318,261	\$3,196,715	\$3,957,082	\$3,929,729	\$2,920,793

Source: City of Harlingen General Fund Budget

As the City constructs additional parks and recreational facilities, the budget levels may need to increase over the next five to ten years to allow for additional maintenance staff.

OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE

Current Staffing Levels - The Parks & Recreation Department is responsible for the maintenance of approximately 770 acres of parkland throughout the city (including the Victor Park Golf Course). The present maintenance staff includes six part-time maintenance workers, two maintenance technicians, one irrigation technician, four grounds keeper tractor mowers, one grounds keeper, two crew leaders, and one maintenance supervisor. On average, each staff member is responsible for maintaining 45 acres.

Staffing Goal - It is recommended that each maintenance staff member maintain an average of 40 acres. This would require an additional two to three maintenance workers beyond who is available today, and additional staff as the parks system continues to grow. Staffing requirements should be projected and approved by City Management and the City Commission prior to the development of any new parks, to ensure that operations and maintenance staff members are available to properly maintain new parks. If staff levels cannot be increased, new parks should be reconsidered.

With the recommendations of additional parks, recreation facilities and trails, it should be recognized that additional manpower is needed for the required maintenance of these various projects. The number of additional staff needed to attend to these proposed facilities will vary depending on the use of these facilities. The provision of adequate staffing must be included as each facility is developed. As the park system grows, additional maintenance resources should be provided to the Parks and Recreation Department. This includes new mowing and transporting equipment, as well as park maintenance staff. Over the next ten years, as new facilities are added, park maintenance staff should grow at the same rate.

A Sustainability Approach to Maintenance

Often parks and recreation agencies are the single largest landowner in a city or community. As such, stewardship of the community's

natural resources and recreation amenities is a key parks department responsibility, all the while managing the conscientious expenditure of tax dollars. According to the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), "Good stewardship requires management practices that protect and enhance the recreational, environmental, social and cultural values of public lands and natural and cultural resources in a manner that is cost-effective and sustainable for future generations."

The role of the Harlingen's Parks and Recreation Department in the conservation of natural and recreation resources, while implementing "sustainability" in its approach to resource management, not only contributes to the health and welfare of its residents, it also reduces operations and maintenance costs, particularly for mowing and irrigation. The "sustainability" approach to natural resource management is not only an environmentally sensitive management strategy; it is "good business" for the city and its residents.

Sustainability is defined as the ability to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Basically, sustainability embraces a stewardship approach that conserves our natural resources for use by future generations. These natural resources include:

- Clean water
- Clean air
- Nutrient rich topsoil
- Wildlife habitat
- Trees and vegetation
- Harnessing of wind and solar energy to reduce the use of fossil fuels
- Develop parks with water conservation in mind, e.g. smart irrigation and treated effluent reuse water

The Harlingen Parks and Recreation Department takes care of approximately 770 acres throughout the city in 23 park locations. To

provide the highest level of park and recreation facilities and amenities, while maintaining these facilities in the most cost-effective manner, the Parks and Recreation Department should implement a “sustainability” based approach to park development and maintenance. This approach includes:

- Planting native tree and grass species that are water conserving and hardy to the south Texas subtropical climate. This approach will encourage the “greening” of parks, while limiting the amount of long-term maintenance required to achieve attractive facilities.
- Developing active areas in parks and greenways that will be maintained to levels dictated by the intended use. For example, high intensity use areas such as athletic facilities or playgrounds will have a higher degree of maintenance and cultivation. On the other hand, areas that are less used or do not require a high level of care, such as disc golf courses or open play areas, can receive a less frequent or less intensive maintenance.
- Planting more trees in parks in mass plantings rather than lines or rows creates more shade, bird habitat, rainfall absorption and summer cooling effect.
- Planting native grasses and wild flowers in peripheral areas of parks and in park sites that are planned as natural or habitat areas. These areas will only need to be mowed once or twice per year, and rarely fertilized, reducing maintenance costs.
- Provide beds of native and drought tolerant ornamental shrubs and perennial plants for color in “high-impact” areas, such as park entrances. These beds can be mulched with recycled green waste such as Christmas trees, chipped branches and dead trees, and lawn clippings to help the soil retain moisture and reduce irrigation demand.
- Changing irrigation practices to water only those areas that are designated as “high intensity use” areas, such as playground and adjacent picnic areas, designated sports practice fields, and athletic facilities that host league play. This approach will conserve water and

reduce costs by discouraging turf growth except in priority locations.

- Implementing drip irrigation for ornamental planting beds.
- Implementing temporary drip irrigation systems for new tree plantings which will then be decommissioned after a three year establishment period.
- Increasing the use of treated effluent reuse water at areas where direct human contact can be managed and where connections are feasible.

PLAN UPDATES

The 2016 Harlingen Parks and Recreation Master Plan is a guide to be used to develop the existing system for future needs over the next five to ten years, with the ultimate life of this plan being ten years. However, during that timeframe changes will occur that impact the recommendations. For example, the community may indicate a special need for a facility not listed in the recommendations, or development of some of the recommendations listed in this plan will occur. A review and update of this plan by city staff should be conducted every year or when a significant change does occur. These updates can be published in short report format and attached to this plan for easy use. Four key areas for focus of these periodic reviews are as follows:

1. Facility Inventory - New facilities should be added to the parks inventory, as well as any significant improvements to Harlingen CISD and Cameron County parks or facilities. Improvements by other major entities such as TSTC that could influence recreation in Harlingen should also be noted.

2. Public Involvement - As mentioned previously, this plan reflects current population and attitudes as expressed by the citizens of Harlingen. However, over time those attitudes and interests may change as the city changes. Periodic opinion surveys are recommended to provide a current account of the attitudes of the citizens and to provide additional direction from the public on issues that may arise. A surveying interval of every four to five years is recommended, and may be combined with other citywide citizen satisfaction surveys.

3. Facility Use - Facility use is a key factor in determining the need for renovation of additional facilities. Updates on league participation of sports facilities should be gathered each season with data from each association. Key efforts should be made to continuously compile data on usage at all facilities, both existing and new. Changes in participation by citizens of Harlingen as well as residents outside the city limits should also be recorded.

4. Action Plan - As items from the action plan discussed earlier are implemented, updates should be made to this prioritized list to provide a current schedule and priority list for city staff.

TOM WILSON
YOUTH SPORTS COMPLEX



