

CHAPTER 2: PARKS, RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE ELEMENT

INTRODUCTION

The parks, recreation, and open space element is a comprehensive representation of the city's vision and goals for the future of the park, recreation and open space system. The 2010 general plan incorporated the parks and recreation department's 1999 Apache Junction Parks and Recreation Master Plan and was intended to be the best reflection of the expressed preferences and needs of the community, as well as a guide for the future expansion, addition, and preservation of Apache Junction's parks and recreation programs.

The city's recreational and open space assets are managed by the parks and recreation department, with review and recommendation from the parks and recreation commission appointed by the city council. The total area of park land and facilities under the department's direction is approximately 2,230 acres. The city recognizes that quality recreation programs and well-maintained facilities are essential community components that improve the quality of life of residents and visitors. Business, industry, and new residents are drawn to communities with well-developed recreational programs and amenities.

Parks & Recreation Funding

Funding for parks and recreation projects has originated from the city's general fund, development fees, bond issues, grants and gifts, corporate partnerships and user fees. Presently, the majority of park and recreation funding is allocated on an annual basis through the city's general fund. Future capital projects and funding sources are identified in the city's capital improvement plan.

National Park & Open Space Benchmarks

The National Recreation and Park Association ("NRPA"), identifies national benchmarks for communities and suggests that the national average is 1 park for every 2100 residents and 10 acres of park land for every 1000 residents. According to Apache Junction's current population of approximately 41,739, the targeted park facilities is 20 and targeted park land is 405 acres. The city currently has 12 city-maintained park/recreation sites; however, the current practice encourages development of smaller "mini-parks" to be built and maintained within new housing developments. There are many more smaller playgrounds and parks available to residents within walking distance from their home with this practice. The city is well ahead of the national average in terms of overall acreage reserved for parks, facilities and open space with 2,230 acres and parkland.

Existing Parks, Trails, and Facilities

This section provides an inventory of the city's existing park sites and facilities. Map X illustrates the location of existing and future facilities. The newly adopted active transportation plan map is also provided to present the city's trail system plan as seen hereon.

CLASSIFICATION OF PARKS

Mini Parks

Mini-parks are small neighborhood parcels less than two (2) acres in size and set aside for a children's play area (i.e., tot lot) or adult amenities that are compatible with surrounding residential uses. Mini-parks in Apache Junction are generally found in planned residential subdivisions and maintained by a HOA.

Neighborhood Parks

Neighborhood parks are typically two to ten acres in area, and while some areas historically remain in city-control, they are now most commonly associated with elementary schools or in larger planned residential subdivisions constructed and maintained by HOAs. These parks may include basketball courts, multi-purpose fields, playgrounds, picnic areas, and open spaces. The following identifies and describes an example of one of the city's neighborhood parks:

- City Complex Park: This two and half (2.5) acre park located south of the library has a picnic ramada, three shuffleboard courts, two horseshoe courts, a playground, and open play turf areas.

Community Parks

The city has elected to allocate most of its resources to community parks. The community is able to get the "biggest bang for its buck" through the principal of economy of scale. It is more cost effective for the department to develop and maintain a few larger parks than several small ones.

Community parks are the largest, most comprehensive type of parks within the parks system. These parks provide the broadest range and largest scale of activities including baseball fields, swimming pools, basketball or football fields, tennis courts, and indoor activities such as a gymnasium or racquetball courts. The following identifies and describes the city's current community parks:

- Prospector Park: This 276-acre facility is located on Bureau of Land Management ("BLM") land north of Lost Dutchman Boulevard on Idaho Road and provides two soccer fields, four softball fields, picnic ramadas with barbeque grills, a playground and open playfield, tennis, pickleball, racquetball, volleyball and basketball courts, horseshoe pits, concessions and restrooms. While this park is extensively improved, there is ample room to add recreational features.
- Superstition Shadows Park: This 23-acre site is owned by the Apache Junction Unified School District ("AJUSD") located between Desert Shadows Middle School and Apache Junction High School at 1091 W. Southern Avenue. It is jointly maintained and operated by an intergovernmental agreement between city and AJUSD. The park provides a community aquatics center, volleyball court, playground,

tennis courts, picnic ramadas, concessions, restrooms, ball field, skate park and open playfield.

- Silly Mountain Park: This 200-acre park is located on BLM land at 5203 E. 36th Ave. just north of Highway 60 on Silly Mountain Road. The park provides hikers with over three and half (3.5) miles of trails varying from easy to difficult to hike up and around Silly Mountain offering great views of the city as well as the valley. Additionally there is an Americans with Disabilities Act (“ADA”) accessible interpretive trail which showcases a variety of native Sonoran Desert plants. There are also several amenities planned for future development in the Silly Mountain Park Master Plan.

Special Use Parks/Facilities

Special use parks are oriented toward a specific theme such as a golf course, botanical garden, or recreational facility. These park sizes may vary greatly, but their use would remain consistent throughout the facility. The following identifies and describes the city’s current special use parks and facilities:

- Multi-Generational Center: This nearly 37,000 square foot facility is located at 1035 N. Idaho Road just south of the city library. The facility offers a variety of recreational, fitness, educational and social opportunities for patrons ranging from children and youth to activities and programs for senior adults.
- Rodeo Park: This twenty (20) acre site is located on BLM land southeast of Prospector Park on Lost Dutchman Boulevard and is equipped with restrooms/concessions, a lighted arena and bleachers. The site is used for the annual Lost Dutchman Days Carnival and Rodeo, along with other year round events.
- Veterans Memorial Park: This two (2) acre park is located on the southwest corner of the City Hall Complex at 1001 North Idaho Road and provides a gazebo and open area used for outdoor meetings, parties, and weddings.
- Little League Park: This three (3) acre site is located on AJUSD property at 1700 West Broadway and provides two baseball fields and restrooms/concessions.
- Flatiron Community Park: The three and a half (3.5) acre park is located at 100 North Apache Trail in the downtown core, and was constructed to host events and activities to attract residents and visitors alike. It provides picnic pavilions, an open turf area for events and play, an interactive splashpad, “Think Water” water/sewer conservation and demonstration areas, a botanical walk and restrooms. Future amenities include expansion of covered ramadas and concrete sidewalks to accommodate event booths.

Lineal Parks/Open Space

Lineal parks are oriented towards hiking, biking, horseback riding and walking trails. The width and length of lineal parks is variable and based on the function and available space. Open space is also a vital part of the city's park system serving to protect the Sonoran Desert character of the community, enhance right-of-ways, as well as preserving native desert and providing flood protection. The City's 1993 Multi-Use Trail Master Plan was the first step in the development of a unified open space trails system plan and has recently been incorporated into the city-wide Active Transportation Plan. The following identifies and describes the city's current lineal parks and open spaces:

- Sheep Drive Trail System: This historically significant 1,628 acre multi-use trail surrounds the city to the north and east with a meandering system of trails for equestrian, mountain biking and hiking use, as well as natural environment for animals and animal observers. The master plan of this facility, calls for trailheads, trail improvements and many other amenities in the future.
- City/county retention basin: This 3-acre area serves as a flood water retention site in addition to providing open space and recreational activities such as picnicking. It is also the city's first proposed formal off leash dog park.
- Arroyo Verde open space area: This 11-acre site located northeast of Ironwood Drive and 16th Avenue in the Arroyo Verde residential subdivision provides a local trail system for the neighborhood in addition to flood protection and open space.
- Renaissance Point open space: Located at 20th Avenue and Palo Verde Drive in the Renaissance Point subdivision, this 8-acre area provides both a local trail for the neighborhood as well as flood protection and open space and a half basketball court.
- City right-of-way and highway landscapes: There are various areas that the public works and parks and recreation departments maintain to assist the city in enhancing the community overall and right-of-way spaces at the city's most visible locations as follows: Phelps Drive, Royal Palm Road, Plaza Drive, the focal point and marquee, highway medians and roundabouts, etc.

Regional Parks

In addition to the city's many park facilities, there are a few larger, regional parks located outside the city limits that are operated by the State of Arizona or United States Forest Service. The following identifies and describes these regional parks:

- Lost Dutchman State Park: This 300-acre park is located on BLM property northeast of the city bordering the Tonto National Forest. The park is used primarily for hiking, picnicking, and overnight camping.
- Usery Mountain Regional Park: This 3,648-acre park is located northwest of the intersection of McKellips Road and Meridian Drive at the western end of the Goldfield Mountains, adjacent to the Tonto National Forest, and offers a variety of activities such as hiking, biking, archery, camping, horseback riding, picnicking, stargazing and flying model airplanes.
- Tonto National Forest: This approximate three (3) million-acre national forest is located north and east of the city and contains the Superstition and Goldfield Mountains, as well as six lakes that are used for recreational and hydrological purposes.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

It is the intent of this element to advocate for an overall healthy community through access to parks, recreational facilities, trails and active neighborhoods designs. These efforts will help create a dynamic community while reducing health problems such as obesity, heart disease, and asthma.

GOALS AND POLICIES

GOAL 2.1: DEVELOP A SYSTEM OF PARKS, TRAILS AND OPEN SPACE TO MEET THE RECREATIONAL AND HEALTH NEEDS OF APACHE JUNCTION RESIDENTS AND VISITORS

- 1) Policy: Encourage and facilitate public participation in planning and expanding the parks and trail system through various means, including regularly scheduled parks and recreation commission meetings.
- 2) Policy: Consider development of community sponsored facilities such as: off-leash dog parks, expansion of pickleball courts, open space expansion, archaeological parks on BLM land, landfill park conversion, bicycle motocross ("BMX") and other bicycle facilities.
- 3) Policy: Coordinate with developers to incorporate potential sites for parks, trails, open space and other recreational facilities in their development master plans. Continue to require residential developers to construct neighborhood parks and place operation and maintenance responsibilities on HOAs.
- 4) Policy: Coordinate with other public and private groups to promote joint acquisition, use and public/private participation in the development of new parks and trails and recreational facilities.
- 5) Policy: Update and reintroduce the parks and recreation master plan for review and eventual approval by the parks and recreation commission and the city council.

GOAL 2.2: PLAN FOR THE SAFETY, MAINTENANCE, AND EXPANSION OF EXISTING FACILITIES

- 1) Policy: Include priority park system expansion projects and necessary maintenance programs in the city's annual budget and capital improvement plan, per the needs of the facility and existing individual master plan documents.
- 2) Policy: Pursue options for purchase or patent from the BLM on Prospector Park, Silly Mountain Park, the Multi-Use Trail System and the Rodeo Grounds.
- 3) Policy: Consider updates, as needed, to the intergovernmental agreements with Pinal County, AJUSD and the Superstition Fire and Medical District ("SFMD") to increase usability of community facilities.
- 4) Policy: Maintain an area in honor of war veterans as part of the city hall campus.
- 5) Policy: Continue to enhance landscaping in high visibility right-of-ways such as the Apache Trail/Old West Highway median.

GOAL 2.3: TAKE A LEADERSHIP ROLE IN THE COMMUNITY FOR EXECUTION OF A DIVERSE PARKS AND RECREATION PROGRAMMING AND SERVICES STRATEGY

- 1) Policy: Maintain existing youth and adult volunteer programs and develop new programs to further enhance youth programs and facilities, to include the safety and security of the park system through coordination with the park ranger subdivision of the department (such as: park watch program).
- 2) Policy: Through citizen input and the parks and recreation commission, evaluate the needs and provide a variety of programs and services related to recreational, health, and wellness needs of the community. Support and assist related non-profit organizations to ensure success in delivering same services and avoid duplicative efforts.
- 3) Policy: Maintain and develop special events that attract visitors and residents to parks and recreation facilities and downtown business district.
- 4) Policy: Develop and promote programs and facilities that are inclusive in nature that enhance the lives of individuals with special needs.
- 5) Policy: Support and assist youth serving non-profit organizations (e.g., little league and 4H) to ensure their success in the community.

GOAL 2.4: PROMOTE THE PARKS, TRAILS AND OPEN SPACE SYSTEM AS A QUALITY OF LIFE ASSET TO ATTRACT NEW EMPLOYERS, RESIDENTS AND VISITORS TO THE COMMUNITY

- 1) Policy: Maximize participation in programs through improved marketing and offering multiple registration options (including online, counter, mail-in).
- 2) Policy: Maximize the public use of facilities through improved marketing and customer-oriented reservation processes.
- 3) Policy: Utilize a multi-modal marketing approach to include print, electronic, radio, televised, and social media sources. Be visible at both city-sponsored and non-city-sponsored events in the community.

GOAL 2.5: UTILIZE MULTIPLE FUNDING SOURCES IN ORDER TO MAXIMIZE SERVICES, PROGRAMS, AND FACILITY AMENITIES FOR CITY RESIDENTS

- 1) Policy: Work cooperatively with the city's revenue development department to maximize use of grants, gifts, and corporate partnerships.
- 2) Policy: Evaluate the parks and open space development fee and adjust as needed based on impact from users.
- 3) Policy: Evaluate the parks and recreation fee structure for programs, facility rentals, and services every five years to insure that they are comparable with market and the specific demographic within the community.