

Appendix B

Park Classification System

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Standards For Parks, Open Space And Recreation Facilities

The Anchorage Parks and Recreation Department adopted standards, policies and guidelines for parks and recreation facilities in the 1970's. The Anchorage Bowl Park, Greenbelt and Recreation Facilities Plan updated these standards in 1985 based on the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) guidelines. Standards provide a range of size and space for various types of parks and recreation facilities. Standards are used as benchmarks to ensure that park and recreation facilities are distributed equitably among the various neighborhoods and regions of the Anchorage Bowl. Anchorage has successfully employed these standards in park acquisition and facility development during the past thirty years. At the time of the 1985 Park, Greenbelt and Recreation Facilities Plan, Anchorage adopted most of the standards recommended by the NRPA with some modification for our northern city status and our higher participation rates in outdoor recreation.

The basic values and benefits underlying the creation of standards include:

- A systematic means to approach park acquisition and development;
- Help promote equal distribution of parkland and recreational facilities from one community to another;
- Help maintain a balanced system of parks, natural open space and a wide range of recreational opportunities while avoiding overuse of parklands and facilities in those cases where opportunities might be limited;
- It provides an opportunity to view system components within an overall context with measures for success;
- It focuses all activities on providing services that benefit the public;
- It allocates limited resources to highest and best uses;
- It allows for incremental and orderly improvements to the park and recreation system; and
- It builds community trust, support and cooperation.

Park Classifications

The following classifications are intended for use by the Anchorage Parks and Recreation Department as guidelines to develop an equitable system of parks, recreation facilities and natural open space for the Anchorage Bowl. The revised classifications are based on previous guidelines from the NRPA adopted by Anchorage in 1985. The key areas of change have been with the development of five general classifications with sub-categories for parks and facility types under each general classification. The five

classifications are Neighborhood Use Areas, Community Use Areas, Special Use Areas, Natural Resource Areas, and Trails and Connectors. These are summarized in Figure 3 and described in more detail in this section. Along with the detailed description of each park classification, this section also presents the level of service standards for each park type and the justification for those standard

Neighborhood Use Area

These are close to home recreation areas where density is high and include areas for informal play, family and community building, create sense of neighborhood and serve as focal point for residents. Sub-categories within this classification include:

- Mini-Park
- Neighborhood Park
- Elementary School-Park Sites
- Developed trail access corridor
- *etc.*

Recreation Use

Functional recreational facilities and use include play areas, playground equipment, open play field, individual picnic (small shelter), small group picnic area, practice quality athletic field, minimal parking, trail head access, restroom, and drinking water fountain where possible. There should be a balance of developed/undeveloped area and some trail development as linkage for the area wide trail system. General maintenance is not at a level required for high level specific activities; permits are available for reserved uses only; moderate improvements to support facility type, but balanced; security lighting; informal landscaping; school grounds also typical use

Location Criteria

The areas should be close to individual homes and centrally located within safe walking distance of 1/4 mile if elementary school-parks are included, but not less than 1/2 mile for urban parks and 1-2 miles for rural areas. The parks should be uninterrupted by arterial roads and other physical barriers that block safe access. These distances will vary depending on density of development. The hillside area and rural areas with density less than 2 units per acre should have a distance of between 1 and 2 miles.

Size Criteria

Demographic profiles and population density within the park's service area are the primary determinant of the park's size. Generally, 5 acres is considered acceptable as the minimum size necessary to provide space for a menu of recreation activities with 10 acres

optimal, but may be as large as 20 acres. The ratio of park acres to area population should not exceed 2.5 acres per 1,000 population.

Site Selection Criteria and Guidelines

Ease of access from the surrounding neighborhood, central location, and linkage to greenways should be key concerns when selecting a site. The site itself should exhibit the physical characteristics appropriate for both active and passive recreational use. Since one of the primary reasons people go to a park is to experience a pleasant outdoor environment, the site should exhibit some innate aesthetic qualities. Given the importance of location, neighborhood parks should be selected before a subdivision is platted and acquired as part of the development process. The site should have well-drained and suitable soils for development and level topography on at least sixty percent of the total area for active play. Ideally, it should be connected to other park system components such as natural resource areas, lakes, ponds, and greenways.

Since each neighborhood in a community is unique and neighborhood parks are intended to serve the local community, neighborhood input should be used to determine the development program for the park. The guidelines presented here should be used as a framework to guide program development and ensure consistency with other park system components. They are not intended to be used as an impediment to creative design solutions.

Development of a neighborhood park should seek to achieve a balance between active and passive park uses. As a general rule, active recreational facilities should consume approximately 50% of the park's acreage. Active recreational facilities are intended to be used in an informal and unstructured manner. With the exception of limited use by youth teams, neighborhood parks are not intended to be used for programmed activities that result in overuse, noise, parking problems and congestion. They should have space and facilities for the active recreational pursuits of children, teenagers and young adults as well as quiet landscaped areas for older residents to relax with their families and as buffers to residential settings.

The most common types of spaces and facilities that are designed within neighborhood parks may include some of the following: play equipment for preschool and older children, paved multi-purpose courts such as tennis, basketball, volleyball and related games, and free play areas with grass lawns. The park may also include an open play or practice field suitable for baseball, soccer and other field games, landscaping as a buffer to surrounding roads and land use, passive recreational areas for senior citizens and others including internal trails and walks, benches, gardens, picnic tables, quiet areas, outdoor picnic areas and a small parking lot for 7 to 10 vehicles. Not all of the above facilities will be found at all neighborhood parks.

Specific Park Sub-categories within the Neighborhood Use Classification may include:

- Mini-Parks – Used to address limited, isolated or unique recreational needs where adequate land is not available to build a full neighborhood park. Mini-parks are small park parcels, usually less than two acres in size. They are generally set aside to serve a segment of the population such as young children or senior citizens. A good example is a children’s play area built within a townhouse or condominium project. The types of improvements typically developed include children’s play equipment, seating, limited grass areas, picnic table, informal play area and other amenities.
- Neighborhood Parks – These parks remain the basic unit of the system and serve as the recreational and social focus of the neighborhood. Focus is on informal active and passive recreation. Neighborhood parks provide a wide variety of recreational opportunities within residential areas. These parks range in size between 5 and 20 acres and are usually located within walking distance of neighborhood residents. They should have space and facilities for the active recreational pursuits of children, teenagers and young adults as well as quiet landscaped areas for older residents to relax with their families. They act as buffers to residential settings. Elementary schools often provide some of the typical neighborhood park components such as ball field space and playground equipment.
- Elementary School-Park – By combining the resources of two public agencies, the School-Park classification allows for expanding the recreation, social, and educational opportunities available to the community in an efficient and cost effective manner. Depending on circumstances, combining parks with elementary school sites can fulfill the space requirements for other classifications of parks, such as neighborhood, community, sports complex and special use. The important outcome in the joint-use relationship is that both the school district and the park system benefit from shared use of facilities and land area.
- Trails and Connectors --The primary function of trails and connectors for neighborhood use areas is to provide for safe access between the user’s home and the park through connector trails. This may include designated bike trails where possible or paved sidewalks where trails are not available. Connector trails should be located within 1/4 mile of residences and not blocked by a collector or arterial street. The second type of trail within this classification is the multipurpose park trail located within each park unit. These trails can be paved or soft-surfaced and are intended to focus on recreational values in harmony with natural environment.

Community Use Area

Community parks are larger in size and serve a broader purpose than neighborhood parks. The focus is on meeting the recreation needs of several neighborhoods or a large section of the community as well as preserving unique landscapes or natural use areas. They allow for group activities and offer other recreational opportunities not feasible, nor perhaps desirable, at the neighborhood level. The primary purpose of a community park is to provide opportunities for social contact with a wide variety of members of different neighborhood, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. These parks meet the specialized needs of a broader community; have higher technical design requirements; provide a sense of community; and increase economic development potential. Like neighborhood parks there should be a balance between active and passive recreation activities. Sub-categories within this classification may include:

- Community Park
- Large Urban Park
- Town Center Park
- Middle School-Park Site
- Developed trail access corridor
- *etc.*

Recreation Use

Neighborhood and community input should be the primary determinant of a development program for a community park. As with a neighborhood park, the guidelines presented should be used as a framework to guide development and ensure consistency with other park system components. They should not be used as an impediment to creative and unique design solutions.

Community parks should have a balance of active and passive uses. Although active recreation facilities are intended to be used in an informal and unstructured manner, reserved and programmed use is compatible and acceptable. However, community parks are not intended to be used extensively for programmed athletics and tournaments. These activities are better suited to special use regional sports complexes designed to accommodate heavy sports use.

A menu of potential active recreation facilities includes large play structures, game courts, multi-purpose sports fields for play or practice, tennis courts, volleyball courts, shuffleboard courts, horseshoe areas, ice skating areas, swimming beaches, disc golf areas and special event/activity facilities. Passive activity facilities may include extensive internal trails (that connect to the community trail system), individual and group picnic areas and large shelters, general open space and unique landscape features, nature study areas, formal interpretive/educational facilities, and ornamental gardens. Facilities for cultural activities, such as plays and concerts in the park, are also appropriate as are potential visitor attractions. The distribution of land area between active and passive recreation is determined on a site by site basis and is based on the natural features of the site.

Parking lots should be sized to meet the appropriate recreation use suitable for each site. There is some specialized, high level maintenance with restroom and support facilities. Park lighting should be used for security, safety and lighting facilities as appropriate. Consideration for night sky should be considered and appropriate lighting should be selected to limit up lighting. Adequate buffering between active and passive use and adjacent neighborhoods and residential areas should be provided.

Location Criteria

A community park should serve two or more neighborhoods. Although its service area should be 1 to 2 miles in radius, the quality of the natural resource base should play a significant role in site selection. The site should be serviced by arterial and collector streets and be easily accessible from throughout its service area by way of interconnecting trails. While community parks should be strategically sited throughout the community, their locations can be significantly impacted by other types of parks. Most notable among these are school-parks, natural resource areas, and special use areas, each of which may provide some of the same recreational opportunities provided in community parks. When calculating the level of service required for community parks these other parks should be considered as justification for or against locating a community park in a specific area.

Size Criteria

Demographic profiles, population density, resource availability and recreation demand within its service area are the primary determinants of a community park's size. Although an optimal size for a community park is between 20 to 100 acres, its actual size should be based on the land area needed to accommodate desired uses or unique natural features to be incorporated into the park.

Site Selection Criteria and Guidelines

The site's natural character should play a very significant role in site selection, with emphasis on sites that preserve unique landscapes within the community and/or provide recreational opportunities not otherwise available. Ease of access from throughout the service area, geographically centered, and relationship to other park areas are also key concerns in site selection.

The site should exhibit physical characteristics appropriate for both active and passive recreation use. It should have soils suitable for development of appropriate facilities with positive drainage, varying topography and a mix of vegetation. Where feasible it should be adjacent to natural resource areas and greenways. These linkages tend to expand the recreational opportunities within the community and enhance the perception of surrounding park space.

Depending upon their individual character and use, lakes, ponds and streams may be associated with either community parks or natural resource areas in that the former is generally more developed for recreational use than the latter. A natural resource area may have a community park or neighborhood park set within its boundaries and still retain the larger natural resource area classification or vice versa.

Specific Park Sub-categories within the Community Use Classification may include:

- **Community Park** – These parks provide space for those recreational activities that serve a wider population than the surrounding neighborhood and are intended to serve several neighborhoods within a geographic area of the city. These parks range between 20 to 100 acres in size and provide a balance of natural environments and developed facilities.
- **Large Urban Park** -- These parks are usually larger in size and can range up to 100 acres. They should provide a mix of natural beauty and developed facilities. Extensive wooded areas are often part of large urban parks, lending a sense of the natural landscape to the urban setting. The types of facilities often found in large urban parks include a golf course, athletic field complex, a nature center, a day camp, boating/swimming areas, picnic areas and shelters. Other facilities include a mixture of trails and off-street parking facilities. Russian Jack Springs Park is an example of a large urban park in Anchorage. These parks can have a slightly larger service area of up to 5 miles in radius.
- **Town Center Park** -- This is a new category and is intended to provide a balance of open space in highly developed urban centers where there is a mix of retail shops, office space, culture and arts, restaurants, and high-density residential units. They provide for a mix of social and economic opportunities. The park can range in size from 1 acre up to 20 acres depending on program requirements. Development is predominantly hardscape and formal landscape elements at the pedestrian scale. Plazas, outdoor seating, concert areas and outdoor cafés are appropriate uses in or adjacent to the park. The park should have access to other public spaces such as libraries or community centers and public parking. Wind and sun access are important considerations in siting the facilities to accommodate year round use. Activities can be both active and passive with a mix appropriate to the surrounding uses. Special events, concerts, craft fairs and exhibits are all appropriate uses. Town Square Park is a good example of a Town Center Park in Anchorage. These parks can have a slightly larger service area of up to 5 miles in radius.
- **Middle School-Park Site** -- By combining the resources of two public agencies, the School-Park classification allows for expanding the recreation, social, and educational opportunities available to the community in an efficient and cost

effective manner. Depending on circumstances, combining parks with middle school sites can fulfill the space requirements for other classifications of parks, such as neighborhood, community, sports complex and special use. The important outcome in the joint-use relationship is that both the school district and the park system benefit from shared use of facilities and land area.

- Trails and Connectors -- the primary function of trails and connectors for community use areas is to provide for safe access between the user's home and the park through connector trails that link to the larger system-wide trail network. This may include designated multi-use bike trails where possible and paved sidewalks where trails are not available. Connector trails should be located within 1 mile of residences and not blocked by a collector or arterial street. The second type of trail within this classification is the multipurpose park trail located within each park unit. These trails can be paved or soft-surfaced and are intended to focus on recreational values in harmony with natural environment.

Special Use Areas

The Special Use classification covers a broad range of parks and recreation facilities oriented toward single-purpose use. These areas are used for athletic tournaments and events; highly organized activities; activities with special requirements and provide for economic as well as social and physical benefits to the community. They have highly specialized maintenance and management requirements; specific game/field or event preparation on a regular basis; activities limited to one or two purposes only; minimal grounds maintenance; some benches, signs and beautification improvements requiring a higher level of maintenance; low level lighting; encourage informal uses and health-related activities. Special uses generally fall into three categories:

- Outdoor Recreation Facilities-Examples include large regional sports complexes for soccer, softball or baseball, tennis centers, golf courses, Nordic ski centers, downhill ski areas; dog sledding trails; equestrian trails, skijoring trails, motocross area, designated sports fields/complexes and high school sites.
- Historic/Cultural/Social Sites-unique local cultural opportunities. Examples include historic downtown areas, performing arts parks, botanical gardens, ornamental gardens, indoor theaters, amphitheaters, special event venues and public buildings.
- Recreation Facilities-specialized or single purpose facilities. Examples include community centers, senior centers, hockey arenas, marinas, and aquatic parks.

Recreation Use

Since each special use facility is unique, community input through surveys and focus group meetings should be the primary determinant of a development program. For sports

complexes projected demand for the specific types of facilities should be the primary determinant of the development program. Each sports governing body provides specific facility development standards and guidelines.

Parking lots should be provided as necessary to accommodate participants and spectators. Allowance for team changeovers should be considered with an additional 50 percent parking provided for sports areas. Lights should be used for security, safety and to protect from night sky pollution or impacts to surrounding residents.

Location Criteria

Recreation need, community interests, the type of facility, access and land availability are the primary factors influencing location. Special use facilities should be viewed as strategically located community-wide facilities rather than as serving well-defined neighborhoods or areas. The site should be easily accessible from arterial and collector streets, where feasible. It should also be accessible from a trail connector system as well.

Size Criteria

Facility space requirements are the primary determinants of site size. As an example, a golf course may require 150 acres, whereas a community center with parking may fit on 10 to 15 acres.

Site Selection Criteria and Guidelines

Where feasible, a geographically central site is optimal. Given the variety of potential special uses, no specific standards are defined for site selection. As with all park types, the site itself should exhibit the physical characteristics appropriate for the proposed use.

Natural Resource Area

Natural resource areas are lands set aside for preservation of significant natural resources, remnant landscapes, open space and visual aesthetics or buffering. These lands can consist of individual sites exhibiting natural resources; lands that are unsuitable for development but offer natural resource potential such as steep slopes, drainageways and ravines, surface water management areas and utility easements; protected lands, such as wetlands/lowlands, shorelines along waterways, lakes and ponds. The objective with these lands is to enhance the livability and character of the community by preserving as many of its natural amenities as possible; conserve natural features of the land; retain and filter storm water; serve as buffers between incompatible land uses; lend definition to neighborhood areas; provide non-motorized links between residential areas, parks and schools; protect wildlife and fish habitat and populations; provide recreational opportunities close to home. Examples include:

- “A” & “B” Wetlands
- Forest Preserve
- Wildlife Preserve
- Aquifer recharge, Storm water and water quality areas
- Watershed
- Fish & Wildlife habitat

Recreation Use

Although natural resource areas are resource based rather than user based, they can provide some passive recreational opportunities including nature viewing and study, greenways for trail linkage and connections, trail head and limited parking areas. Appropriate recreational uses of a natural resource area include access points; trails; nature appreciation, interpretation and education; and other uses that cause minimal resource impact. Access ways are maintained, trail heads and trail maintenance occurs, minimal formal areas, lighting (low level) where appropriate, minimal alterations to land.

Location Criteria

Resource availability and opportunity are the primary factors determining location.

Size Criteria

As with location, resource availability and opportunity are the primary factors determining size. The practical limit of acreage set aside under this classification lies in the quality of the resource, availability, community development considerations and acquisition costs. Reclaimed wetlands and wetland banks can fall into this category.

Site Selection Criteria and Guidelines

Resource quality is the primary determinant when it comes to selecting a site for preservation. Sites that exhibit unique natural resources or remnant landscapes of the region should be of the highest priority.

Natural Resource Use areas are further divided into three categories including:

- **Natural Resource Preservation Land:** Those areas that perform important environmental functions and have high ecological values. This includes streams, associated riparian zones and streambank setbacks, flood hazard areas, Class A and B wetlands, seismic hazard zones, steep slopes in excess of 15 percent, lands with conservation easements and other restrictions and any other lands determined to have unique or threatened habitat values. These lands should be permanently

dedicated as NR Preservation Lands that can only be altered by a 60 percent vote of the community.

- **Natural Resource Conservation Land:** Those areas with significant natural vegetation, perform storm water management, habitat, visual or noise buffer, or other natural function important to the community and that contain features, which makes development undesirable due to cost or other mitigating impacts. These lands should be designated Natural Resource Conservation Lands that can only be altered by a 50 percent vote of the community or by a two thirds majority of the Anchorage Assembly with Park and Recreation Commission approval. Individual park master plans would provide determinations of these areas where they include portions of certain parkland.
- **Natural Resource Reserve Land:** Those areas that retain most of their natural vegetation, perform a variety of natural functions found throughout the Anchorage Bowl, but that have features that make development possible with limited cost and minimal disturbance to the surrounding ecosystem. This can include upland forest areas, Class C wetlands (developable), and previously disturbed sites. These lands should be designated Natural Resource Reserve and identified for future development for Neighborhood, Community or Special Use areas as population increase warrants.

Trails and Connectors

Trails and connectors provide non-motorized links between residential areas, parks and schools; close to home recreation; sense of community; they increase economic development potential and contribute to a healthy community; provide wildlife migration corridors and habitat. This classification consists of trails, greenbelts, and linear parks and includes a mix of hard and soft surface trails. Maintenance of these areas is dependent on the type of trail and design standard. Examples include:

- Paved multi-use trail
- Natural surface trail
- Trail head
- Trail head parking area
- *etc.*

Recreation Use

Trails and connectors are intended to provide direct access from residences to parks, schools and other public and private facilities. They are a means of non-motorized

transportation as well as a recreational resource. Trails and connectors are potential visitor attractions providing outdoor oriented visitors safe and scenic routes for viewing the city and traveling from one attraction to another. They primarily provide corridors free of vehicle traffic where people can pursue mobile recreational interests such as running, hiking, walking, biking, skating, cross-country skiing, dog sledding, and more.

Location Criteria

There should be a trail or connector within 1/4 to 1/2 mile of every Anchorage residence in urban areas and 1 mile in rural areas. Trails should be located within parks as well as providing safe routes between neighborhoods and parks. Trails and connectors should be located in areas that provide links to the existing trail system and/or links between neighborhoods, schools, parks and other public and private facilities.

Size Criteria

The size of trails and connectors depends on the type and class of trail. Paved trails should be 8-12 feet wide with a minimum 1 foot shoulder on each side. Natural surface trails should be a minimum of 4 feet wide. Specific trail classifications and design standards are provided in the Anchorage Areawide Trails Plan.

Site Selection Criteria and Guidelines

Trails and connectors should serve the entire community and site selection should be based on maintaining the existing supply ratio. Other variables are listed in the Anchorage Areawide Trails Plan.