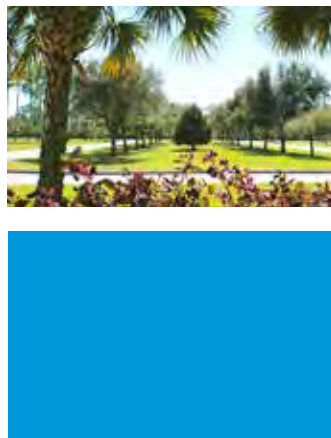


# City of North Port Parks + Recreation Master Plan



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## **Toole Design Group, 2016**

8484 Georgia Avenue, Suite 800, Silver Spring, MD 20910  
www.tooledesign.com

T: 301 927 1900

This document has been prepared by Toole Design Group in a strategic partnership with:

- Barth Associates, LLC
- Perez Planning + Design, LLC
- Ballard King & Associates, Ltd.
- ETC Leisure Vision

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**Client(s):** City of North Port

**Client Contact:** Sandy Pfundheller, CPRP

**Project Manager:** Carlos F. Perez, PLA

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# IN

The purpose of the City of North Port Parks and Recreation Master Plan is to provide the City of North Port Parks and Recreation Division with future direction regarding the City's parks facilities, programs and activities. Specifically, the scope of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan identified the following objectives:

- Reflect the City's community park-based parks and recreation service delivery philosophy;
- Identify and prioritize residents' needs, including the use of statistically valid mail/telephone survey;
- Prioritize the implementation of completed Parks and Recreation Division master plans and improvements;
- Identify gaps, opportunities, and recommendations for major bicycle and pedestrian connections;
- Provide recommendations related to events, programs, and activities that can be developed to support Ecotourism; and,

- Review, assess, and recommend future direction and priorities related to operations, management, programming, and staffing of the Parks and Recreation Division.

To achieve this, the City of North Port Parks and Recreation Master Plan is organized into the following sections:

**1.0 - Existing Conditions Analysis:** This section provides an understanding of the existing and planned conditions of the City, its population, and its parks and recreation system. It includes an inventory of the City's parks and recreation facilities; an overview of the Division's operations, staffing, maintenance, policies, and budget; a demographic analysis; and an analysis of relevant plans and studies.

**2.0 - Needs and Priorities Assessment:** This section provides an evaluation of City's parks system and an assessment of the City's Parks and Recreation Division. Additionally, this section provides a comprehensive, community participation-driven needs assessment that uses qualitative, quantitative, and observational analysis techniques to identify resident park facility and programmatic needs and priorities. Techniques used include a variety of Level

of Services (LOS) analysis, a statistically valid mail-in and telephone survey, an on-line survey, public workshops, and a series of one-on-one stakeholder meetings and focus group meetings.

**3.0 - Visioning:** Based on the findings from the Existing Conditions Analysis and Needs and Priorities Assessment, this section will establish a vision for the City's parks and recreation system that is grounded in industry best practices and community input, and the City's fiscal capabilities.

**4.0 - Proposed Improvements** Based on the proposed long-range vision, and previous recommendations acknowledged but not yet realized, a comprehensive listing of proposed improvements is presented for consideration relative to the future direction of the City's Park & Recreation system.

Many of the recommendations of this plan are based on the long range vision established in the 2006 Parks and Recreation Master Plan, which is included in Appendix C and is considered part of this document.





1.0

# Existing Conditions Analysis







## 1.0 Existing Conditions

The first step in the parks and recreation system planning process is to understand the existing conditions of the City's parks and recreation system. Specifically, what are the current components of the system? What population does the existing and future parks and recreation system need to serve? And what planning efforts are already in place that can provide a foundation for moving forward? The following chapter answers these and other questions related to the existing state of the City of North Port Parks and Recreation System.

### 1.1 Overview of Existing Parks and Recreation System

The City of North Port has 26 parks and facilities including seven community parks/activity centers, three sports facilities, ten neighborhood parks, seven special use/green space areas, and variety of recreation facilities and amenities. These park classifications are further discussed in Section 2.0. Figure 1.1a on page 10 provides an inventory and Figure 1.1b on page 11 maps the City's existing parks and recreation facilities. These parks range from large facilities with multiple athletic fields to small parks that provide close-to-home recreation opportunities. Seven sites, including Narramore Sports Complex and the athletic fields at Butler Park, are scheduled and maintained by Sarasota

County, and the system is augmented by a number of private recreation facilities including a YMCA and a Boys and Girls Club.

The current system is the result of a number of land ownership and management changes as well as ongoing investments. Under a 1993 interlocal agreement, Sarasota County was designated as the provider of the City's recreational programs, activities and facilities. As North Port urbanized and became increasingly different from the rest of the county, a new interlocal agreement was established in 2006 that passed the management of eleven facilities to the City of North Parks and Recreation division.

Since then—and despite the economic recession—the division has accomplished several large scale projects. For example, the Morgan Family Community Center in Butler Park was completed in 2011, and provides a new 33,000 square-foot facility focused on providing a range of youth programming. In 2010, the City opened the Canine Club, a dog park that quickly became one of the most popular park facilities in the city. In late 2015, the first phase of the Blueways project was completed and the Atwater Splash Pad/Playground/Concession was opened. Following this, the Butler Park Field Renovation project was completed late 2017. The division continues to

improve the system with ongoing projects, such as the continued acquisition of property for the Myakkahatchee Creek Greenway.

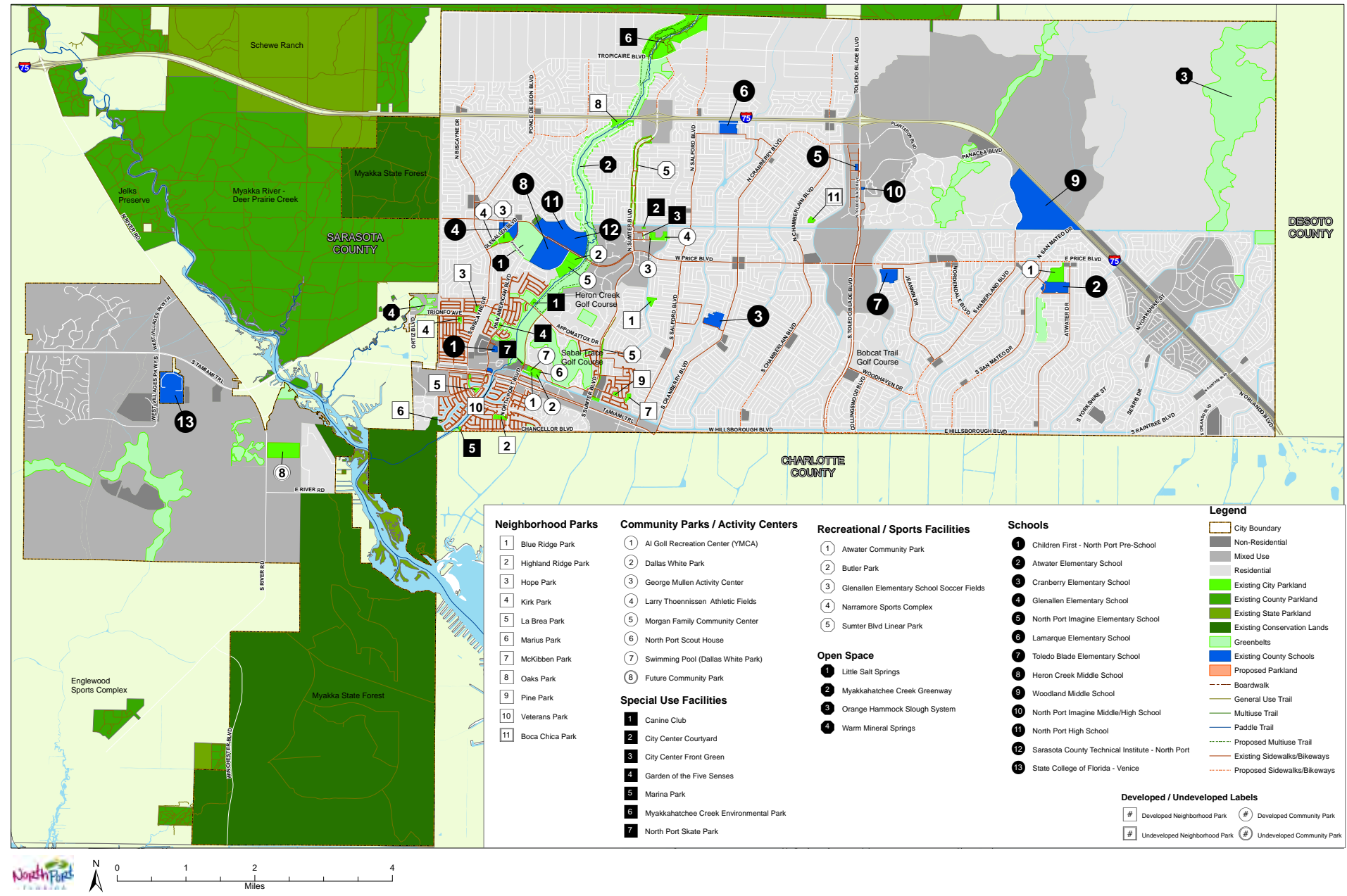
The Myakkahatchee Creek is major natural resource in North Port. The creek, also known as Big Slough, begins in a basin in southeast Manatee County and runs about 22 miles through Sarasota County where it flows into the Myakka River. Approximately seven miles of Myakkahatchee Creek are within the City of North Port, and it is an important ecological resource in terms of water quality, stormwater management, and habitat. The City developed a greenway concept for the creek in 2007, and has since actively pursued acquisition of greenway parcels for conservation and passive recreation.

Through projects like the Myakkahatchee Creek Greenway, the City of North Port has a demonstrated commitment to balancing the conservation of its natural resources with public access for recreation. As noted in the City's Comprehensive Plan Conservation and Coastal Zone Management Element, in 1995, the City converted Myakka Estates development project into the Myakka State Forest. Today, the 8,593-acre forest boasts facilities biking, boating,



[illegible]

Figure 1.1b - City of North Port Parks and Recreation System Base Map





camping, canoeing, fishing, hiking, picnicking, wildlife observation and equestrian trails. The forest is also home to 2.5 miles of frontage of the Myakka River, which is a protected Wild and Scenic River.

The City of North Port is also home to unique spring sites that have both natural and historical importance. Recently acquired by the City in 2014, Warm Mineral Springs Park is Florida's only naturally formed warm water mineral spring, and has been used as a swimming hole in the community for generations. Like the growing

Myakkahatchee Creek Greenway and Myakka Forest, this new acquisition enriches the City of North Port's parks and recreation system with opportunities for residents to connect to nature within a short trip from home.

An important component of any community's parks and recreation system is connectivity. The City of North Port has a traditional suburban street framework and classification system comprised of Principal Arterials (I-75), Arterials, Collectors, and Local Roads. The majority of the roadways in North Port are local and collector roads. The arterials

are primarily used for connecting destinations and facilitating long trips at moderate to high speeds. Their directness make them the ideal routes for connecting parks and open spaces, but become a barrier for bicycles and pedestrians because of their number of travel lanes and speeds. The connectivity issues that are posed by the large arterial roads are amplified by the number of canals. Poor connectivity forces most traffic to travel along the major roads and makes bicycling and walking difficult because of the additional trip length and circuitous routing.

Figure 1.1c - Warm Mineral Springs



Bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure in North Port is currently fragmented. Existing and proposed sidewalks are more common and extensive in newer parts of the city, but the network tends to be limited in older neighborhoods and around schools. Although the City's code now requires that new developments include sidewalks, gaps in the network are still prevalent.

Designated bike paths are found along U.S. 41 and several collector roads. As arterial roads have been widened or are planned to be widened, shared use paths are included in the design – a prime example

being Sumter Boulevard. On-road bike facilities include bike lanes, but their use along arterial roads or collectors with higher volumes of traffic limit their effectiveness with novice cyclists, and therefore among the broader population. Pathways and trails have also been prioritized along stormwater ponds, wetland mitigation areas, and open space preserves, but the system remains limited.

North Port's existing system of parks and natural resources is a strong foundation on which to build. The Parks and Recreation Division's ongoing investments into the system, as well as the City's

demonstrated conservation ethic, have set the stage for success.

**Figure 1.1d - Sumter Boulevard Linear Park**







## 1.2 Recreation Programs, Facilities and Services

In addition to the physical system of parks and recreation facilities, the City of North Port Parks and Recreation Division provides a number of recreation programs. These are generally in four areas:

- General Interest
- Fitness/Exercise
- Sports/Leagues
- Services

Figure 1.2a provides a summary of programs by type over the last three years.

The number of programs offered has increased significantly over the last 3 years. The greatest growth has occurred in the General Interest category, followed by Fitness/Exercise. The vast majority of programs (approximately two thirds) are being conducted in-house, as opposed to being run by a contracted provider. For those programs that are being offered contractually, the split of gross revenues is either 30 percent or 40 percent to the City. The majority of contract instructors are for fitness related activities.

To promote parks and recreation activities and events, the Playbook Guide is developed twice yearly (Summer/Fall and Winter/Spring). Most of the Division's recreation programming occurs at the community centers.

In addition to these programs, the Division also conducts a number of special events. The number of in-house special events has increased 33% in the last year and the number of special events conducted by others has increased. Events organized by service clubs include fishing tournaments and holiday activities, and other community organizations offer walk-a-thons, markets and holiday activities. In addition, a number of planned communities offer some level of recreation programming to serve their residents.

Beyond programs that are offered directly by the City's Parks and Recreation Division, there are youth sports leagues that are conducted by numerous outside organizations. These organizations primarily use City-owned fields for their programs. Based on inter-local agreements established with the County, the County is responsible for daily maintenance and scheduling of these fields while the City is responsible for capital costs over \$5,000. The County in turn, has rental agreements with the following organizations to use the fields:

- Miss North Port Fast Pitch Softball
- North Port Area Little League Baseball
- North Port Huskies Football
- North Port Youth Soccer
- North Port Pop Warner Football and Cheer

The only active agreement that the City of North Port controls is with the North Port Pop Warner Football and Cheer League for use of the concession stand at the George Mullen Activity Center/ Larry Thoennissen Athletic Fields.

**Figure 1.2a: Summary of Programs, 2012-2017**

Program Category	FY 12/13	FY 13/14	FY 14/15	FY 15/16	FY 16/17
General Interest	5	9	20	24	25
Fitness/Exercise	6	13	13	17	17
Sports/Leagues	12	13	10	14	14
Services	2	2	2	4	4
Total Programs	25	37	45	59	60
Contracted	7	17	15	19	20
In-House	19	20	30	40	40

**Figure 1.2b: Special Events, 2012-2017**

Program Category	FY 12/13		FY 13/14		FY 14/15		FY 15/16		FY 16/17	
	Number	Attendance	Number	Attendance	Number	Attendance	Number	Attendance	Number	Attendance
Special Events	28	17,233	26	16,054	27	19,095	24	23,941	32	22,398



### 1.2.1 Indoor Recreation Facilities

The City of North Port Parks and Recreation Division operates three indoor recreation facilities that support the bulk of its programming:

#### Morgan Family Community Center

This 33,000 square foot multi-use facility includes a fitness center, exercise studio, large gymnasium, banquet/meeting space and teen lounge/game room. This is a relatively new facility that has an open design concept and is well maintained.

#### George Mullen Activity Center

This 12,500 square foot multi-use facility includes a small fitness center, gymnasium with stage and meeting space. This center is heavily utilized for the youth summer camp program. This center is older but still in good condition and well maintained.

#### Scout House

Located in Dallas White Park, this small building has one large room with a kitchen attached. This is an older structure that is reasonably well maintained, and is used primarily by scout groups and rentals.

Although membership and daily drop-in visits to the community centers have increased steadily since 2014 member levels have been up and down. It is important to note that the two centers have many of the same amenities and are geographically relatively close to each other.

Figure 1.2c: Community Center Visits and Membership, 2012-2017

	FY 12/13	FY 13/14	FY 14/15	FY 15/16	FY 16/17
Membership and daily drop-in visits	44,260 87,412	65,242 70,324	87,412 70,719	72,708	73,959
Active Acheive Anything Members Memberships	8,180 1,842	10,283 1,185	8,432 1,180	1,263	1,273

\*As reported in annual adopted budget documents





### 1.2.2 Other Providers

Beyond City facilities, there are a number of other significant recreation providers in North Port.

#### North Port Family YMCA

The YMCA, which operates a small child care center and the North Port pool, is located in Dallas White Park. The City owns the swimming pool and the Al Goll Center, but the County pays the YMCA \$10,000 for the Al Goll Center and \$150,000 for the pool to offset operating costs. City is responsible for capital improvements beyond \$5,000.

#### Community Education Center

Also known as Wilfred Churchill Hall, the Community Educational Center is home to the North Port Senior Center, Salvation Army and Senior Friendship Center. However, the Parks and Recreation Division does offer some events at the center and also rents out the facility. Property Maintenance contracts cleaning and maintains the facility.

#### North Port Art Center

The art center is owned by the City but operated by a non-profit cultural arts group. They provide cultural events, arts programs and educational programs.

#### North Port Performing Arts Center

Located at North Port High School, this is a joint venture between the City and the School District. However, there has been limited public use up to this point.

#### Boys & Girls Club

This national organization operates a rather large club in the community.

### Sarasota County

The County operates a number of facilities in the greater North Port area, including the Englewood Community Center and Venice Community Center.

#### Private Health Clubs

There are a number of private health clubs in North Port including Anytime Fitness, You Fit, Fitness 1440, Achieve Fitness, Around the Clock Fitness and several others.

#### Other

There are several dance, martial arts and gymnastics studios in the area. Also a number of churches are available for recreation purposes.

The Sarasota County School District has a variety of indoor facilities and outdoor sports fields but the City is not currently a strong user of these facilities.



### 1.2.3 Outdoor Active Recreation Venues

There are a variety of outdoor recreation venues in the City that support active recreation pursuits. These include:

#### Butler Park

This park currently has four multi-use fields. Of these one is lighted.

#### Atwater Park

The park has four Little League fields and one 90 ft. baseball field. This is the only full-sized baseball field in the city. The other Little League fields are too small to adequately serve the older age divisions. In addition, a splash pad, satellite concession building, and playground were completed late 2015. The splash pad is maintained by a private vendor. This is the only significant park on the east side of the city.

#### Larry Thoennissen Athletic Fields

Located next to the George Mullen Activity Center, these two youth football fields are owned by the City and scheduled and maintained by the County. The North Port Pop Warner Football and Cheer League have their own concession and restroom building next to the fields.

#### Narramore Sports Complex

The complex has both multi-purpose and diamond fields that are utilized by youth sports groups. There are three lighted softball fields, a practice diamond, three lighted

soccer fields plus two concessions stands and restroom building. These fields primarily serve youth sports organizations in the community.

#### Dallas White Park

The park has the only adult softball field in the community. The park also contains Sand Volleyball Courts that are used frequently by self organized leagues.

#### North Port Skate Park

This park serves both skateboarders and BMX riders and has beginner and advanced use areas. This is an unstaffed operation with no admission fees.

#### City Center Front Green

Located in front of City Hall, this area serves as a location for many community based special events.

### 1.2.4 Other Providers

#### Warm Mineral Springs Park

This warm water facility was purchased by the City from Sarasota County. Warm Mineral Springs Park south structure, cyclorama, and north structure have been designated as historic sites on the local register. This is a destination spot that the City contracts to an outside vendor for management but Property Maintenance does provide some services for the facility.





## 1.3 Division Operations and Maintenance Practices

### 1.3.1 Staffing and Organization

The Parks and Recreation Division is located within the General Services Department of the City. This division is responsible for providing recreation programs and services as well as managing the two community centers, skate park, and satellite rental facilities. In addition, there is Property Maintenance, which is under Neighborhood Development Services. They are responsible for parks grounds maintenance as well as overall facilities maintenance.

Parks and Recreation has a total of 15 full-time staff including:

- Parks and Recreation Manager: oversees the entire division.
- Two Recreation Supervisors are responsible for supervising twelve recreation attendants the three recreation coordinators, the Morgan Family Community Center and the George Mullen Activity Center.
- Three Recreation Program Coordinators: each has responsibility for special events, recreational programming, camp, and rental services. One coordinator is based out of the Morgan Family Community Center and two at the George Mullen Activity Center.
- Seven Recreation Attendants: these positions provide front desk and facility supervision duties as well as program assistance.
- Program Specialist: this individual is responsible

for graphic design and the development of the Playbook and other promotional materials.

- Staff Assistant: this position supports the other personnel in the division.

In addition to these full-time positions, there are 5 part-time recreation attendants that can work up to 29 hours a week. These positions are not eligible for over-time but receive some benefits. There are also 16 seasonal camp counselor positions and one head counselor.

Property Maintenance has 17 full-time positions including:

- Property Maintenance Manager: oversees the entire division.
- Planner/Scheduler: assigns staff and assists with planning assignments.
- Building Tech. III: responsible for the supervision of the building maintenance aspect of the division.
- Groundskeeper III: responsible for the supervision of the parks and grounds maintenance portion of the division.
- Three Building Tech. IIs: support basic building maintenance work.
- Building Tech. I: supports basic building maintenance work.
- Six Groundskeeper IIs: support grounds maintenance work.
- Two Groundskeeper Is: supports grounds maintenance work.
- 

- Staff Assistant II: supports the rest of the division staff.

This Division has seen a significant cut-back in staff over the last three to five years as more maintenance functions have been moved to contract status. Maintenance is generally site-based rather than function-based, with the exception of playground inspections and irrigation. The Division has several staff who are qualified to conduct playground safety inspections (CPSI). Virtually all the staff positions in the Division are full-time staff and all but the supervisory staff are unionized.

There are reasonably strong job descriptions in place for all positions in Parks and Recreation and Property Maintenance Divisions. Full-time staff are cross-trained to handle most operational or supervisory responsibilities for a variety of program areas and facilities.



### 1.3.2 Operations Policies and Procedures

The Parks and Recreation Division has basic operational policies and procedures in place that are reviewed and updated annually or as needed. This includes an operations manual that articulates policies dealing with employee expectations, fee structures, program registrations, rentals, refunds and emergency procedures. The Division also has an established vision statement that is supported by mission and purpose statements. This forms the basis for the specific policies and procedures for facilities and operations.

The employee expectations and responsibilities section in the manual deals with important issues associated with employee appearance, the use of social media, financial procedures, vehicle procedures and other items. There is also an extensive portion of this section that notes specific policies and procedures for the operation of both the George Mullen Activity Center and Morgan Family Community Center. Another section of the operations manual articulates the policies regarding fees and charges.

Registration policies are noted in detail as is the step-by-step process for completing a program, pass, and daily visit transaction. The Rec-Trac software system is utilized for these processes. Rec-Trac also allows for on-line registration.

There are also sections of the operations manual that deal with the process of how group exercise classes are handled as well as the basic rental process. This is followed up with a short section on the division's refund policy.

Importantly, the manual contains a detailed emergency action plan. These specifically deal with fire evacuation and medical procedures. There are also injury and incident reporting forms in this section as well.

The last section of the operations manual deals extensively with tracking employee hours, time sheets, and requests for days off. This includes how to use the ExecuTime software system.





### 1.3.3 Maintenance Plans and Procedures

Maintenance of parks and recreation facilities is the responsibility of the Property Maintenance Division. They have responsibility for the maintenance of grounds including the following:

- Mowing pruning, edging, weed control, and ant control
- Monthly playground equipment inspections and repairs
- Fiber mulch replenishment
- Landscaping
- Mulch

In addition, they are also responsible for maintaining all City facilities. Specific tasks include:

- Trash removal
- Weekly inspections and repairs including structure, plumbing, lighting, accessories, etc.
- Weekly stocking of paper products and supplies for janitorial vendor
- Vandalism inspections/removal/repair

Besides Property Maintenance, there is also a significant parks janitorial contract as well as a facilities janitorial contract that handles day-to-day cleaning responsibilities. For parks this includes daily restroom cleaning, daily cleaning of some pavilions and weekly for others, and emptying trash receptacles on a weekly basis. For facilities this is the daily cleaning of the building itself.

A significant number of maintenance functions are also contracted out and more is anticipated in the future.

Athletic field maintenance is the responsibility of Sarasota County but the City is responsible for any capital improvements above \$5,000. The County also maintains other City park areas as well. Specific parks that are maintained by Sarasota County include Atwater Park, Butler Park, the softball field and volleyball court at Dallas White Park, Larry Thoenissen Athletic Fields, Narramore Sports Complex, Marina Park, and Myakkahatchee Creek Environmental Park.

Fleet, a division within Public Works, does all vehicle and small engine repairs, purchasing and upkeep but charges these services back to the Property Maintenance budget. Capital projects are handled in-house for smaller jobs and contracted for large projects.

Property Maintenance tracks costs by park and facility as well as by function. There is strong record keeping and there is a work order system in place. The division utilizes the Naviline software system to manage maintenance functions. There is a preventative maintenance schedule for most facilities.



### 1.3.4 Operating Budgets

The budget for parks and recreation services is divided between the Parks and Recreation Division and the Property Maintenance Division. All budgets are adopted by an annual city ordinance.

The summary of the operations budget for Parks and Recreation is shown in Figure 1.3a. This account covers the operations of the community centers and recreation programs and services.

These budget numbers include personnel costs such as benefits; contract services which has bus transportation, class instructors, athletic officials, festivals and youth activities; travel; rental of equipment and services; fleet charges; office and program supplies; food and fuel; uniforms and minor equipment; and memberships and training.

The cost recovery rate for Parks and Recreation has varied between 30.1 percent and 32.6 percent.

The budget for Property Maintenance is shown in Figure 1.3b. This covers the maintenance of all parks and recreation facilities as well as City Hall and other public buildings.

These budget numbers include personnel costs such as benefits; contract services; utilities, fleet charges; repairs and maintenance, trash fees, and minor equipment.

The cost recovery rate for Parks and Recreation and Property Maintenance together varies between 8.7 percent and 9.8 percent.

Both Parks and Recreation and Property Maintenance Divisions have annual CIP budgets. For recreation programs, Finance adds in an overhead costs for calculating the cost recovery level.

**Figure 1.3a Operations Budget, 2014-2017**

Account	Actual FY-2014	Actual FY-2015	Actual FY-2016	Actual FY-2017	Budgeted FY-2018
<b>Revenues</b>					
Camp Programs	\$91,213	\$97,056	\$98,488	\$100,738	\$149,420
Athletic/Rec. Programs	\$89,187	\$82,074	\$85,346	\$92,117	\$106,450
Memberships	\$67,371	60,683	\$58,761	\$58,217	\$60,000
Gift Cards	\$0	\$0	\$500	\$300	\$200
Special Events	\$16,838	\$21,520	\$21,106	\$29,342	\$28,520
Facility Rentals	\$41,792	\$47,034	\$51,921	\$64,230	\$58,350
Donations/Sponsorships	\$4,475	\$427	\$11,726	\$5,715	\$23,100
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<b>\$310,876</b>	<b>\$308,794</b>	<b>\$327,849</b>	<b>\$350,659</b>	<b>\$426,040</b>
<b>Expenses</b>					
Personnel	\$784,233	\$784,262	\$819,714	\$896,076	\$981,210
Operating	\$202,093	\$199,603	\$185,940	\$265,444	\$275,410
Capital	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$4,482	\$63,310
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$986,326</b>	<b>\$983,866</b>	<b>\$1,005,653</b>	<b>\$1,166,001</b>	<b>\$1,319,930</b>

**Figure 1.3b Property Maintenance Budget, 2014-2017**

Account	Actual FY-2014	Actual FY-2015	Actual FY-2016	Actual FY-2017	Budgeted FY-2018
<b>Expenses</b>					
Personnel	\$1,072,717	\$1,042,342	\$1,049,840	\$1,001,324	\$1,054,870
Operating	\$1,382,508	\$1,340,328	\$1,669,481	\$1,591,140	\$1,813,390
Capital	\$37,672	\$125,957	\$11,594	\$293,941	\$166,520
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$2,492,897</b>	<b>\$2,508,627</b>	<b>\$2,730,914</b>	<b>\$2,886,405</b>	<b>\$3,034,780</b>

### 1.3.5 Fee Philosophy and Policies

Currently the Parks and Recreation Division has a basic schedule of fees that are part of a City ordinance, which is approved on an annual basis. The basic philosophy is that fees are set in large part on a desire to generate strong revenues from recreation programs, facility rentals, and other uses. Recreation programs and services are designated to cover their direct costs.

There is a resident and non-resident fee structure in place for drop-in programs and memberships but this does not apply to special events or rentals. The differential is approximately 30 percent. There is also a refund policy in existence.

Electronic funds transfer (EFT) is utilized for payment of monthly pass (membership) fees to the activity centers.





## 1.4 Demographics

The most effective parks and recreation systems are those that are tailored to meeting the needs of its residents, both present and future. The following section analyzes population data from the City of North Port and discusses how the findings may impact the City's parks and recreation planning process. Key demographics examined include:

- Population + Population Growth
- Age
- Race/Ethnicity
- Household Types
- Household Income
- Housing Occupancy
- Housing Density

In each category, the City of North Port's demographic data is compared to Sarasota County and the State of Florida. Data from 2000, 2010, and the changes between the two years are also discussed. Unless stated otherwise, all data is from the United States Census Bureau.



### 1.4.1 Population

The City of North Port experienced an extremely fast period of growth between 2000 and 2010 (151.61 percent), particularly when compared to Sarasota County (16.41 percent) and the State of Florida (17.46 percent). According to the U.S. Census 2014 Populate Estimates Program, the City's rate of growth has slowed down substantially, with a change of 5.25 percent between 2000 and 2014. This is slightly higher than Sarasota County (4.62 percent) as a whole, and slightly lower than the State of Florida (5.91 percent).

Future population projections were analyzed from two sources. The first source was obtained from the South West Florida Water Management District, (SWFMD) through the year 2040. The data suggests that the City is expected to continue growing at increasing rate through 2030 and then at a decreased rate through 2040. Between 2014 and 2020, the City's population is expected to grow by 19.10 percent and between 2020-2030, by 26.68 percent. By the period of 2030-2040, this growth rate is expected to decrease to 19.49 percent. Those rates are substantially higher than the County's projected growth rates.

The second source of population projection data was obtained from ESRI Business Analyst. This source provides population projection data for the City of North Port for the year 2019. While the accuracy of the exact projections are unclear, the ESRI data projects a population increase from the year 2014 to 2019 of 8.07 percent. This population growth is substantially slower than the growth the City experienced from 2000 to 2010 and the projected growth noted in the SWFMD data. However, it is consistent with the notion that the City will continue to grow. Figure 1.4d illustrates where the growth is projected to occur from

**Figure 1.4a: Population 2000-2014**

	2000 Population	% Change 2000-2010	2010 Population	% Change	2014 Estimate
<b>City of North Port</b>	22,797	+151.61%	57,360	+5.26%	60,380
<b>Sarasota County</b>	325,961	+16.41%	379,448	+4.62%	396,962
<b>State of Florida</b>	15,982,378	+17.64%	18,801,310	+5.81%	19,893,297

**Figure 1.4b: Projected Population 2010-2040**

	2014 Population	2020* Projection	% change 2014 - 2020	2030* Projection	% change 2020-2030	2040* Projection	% change 2030-2040
<b>City of North Port</b>	60,380	74,635	19.10%	101,926	26.78%	126,926	19.49%
<b>Sarasota County</b>	387,161	421,973	8.25%	467,072	9.66%	500,572	6.69%

\*Source: South West Florida Water Management District (SWFMD), 2014

**Figure 1.4c: Projected Population 2014-2019\***

	2014 Estimate	2019 Projection	% change 2014-2019
<b>City of North Port</b>	75,541	81,642	8.07%

\*Source: ESRI Business Analyst, 2015

2014 to 2019. It appears that the western portion of the City is projected to experience that largest increase in population with central and eastern portions of the City receiving less growth.

#### **Population Implications:**

The doubling of North Port's population between 2000 and 2010 has almost certainly resulted in an increased demand for parks and recreation facilities and services. Because of the magnitude of growth, there is a likely a need for additional facilities and programs across the board. Additionally, it appears that the western portion of the City is projected to receive the largest increase in population through 2019 requiring additional parks and recreation facilities in that area of the City.







## 1.4.2 Age

The age distribution of North Port's population is markedly different compared to Sarasota County. Within North Port, the percentage of people aged 35 or younger is greater (42.0 percent versus 29.7 percent in Sarasota County). Conversely, the proportion of the City's population aged 55 and older is considerably smaller than in Sarasota County (30.9 percent versus 46.6 percent in the County). This contrast is illustrated by the City's median age of 40.9 in 2010, and the County's median age of 52.5 that same year. Although different from the County, the City's age distribution is more closely aligned with state-wide figures.

Between 2000 and 2010, there were notable changes within the City of North Port in terms of age distribution. The percentage of residents aged 65 and older dipped by 5.5 percent, whereas in the County this age group's proportion of the population declined by only 0.3 percent and state-wide by only 0.2 percent. The proportion of pre-teens and teenagers (ages 10-19) also grew markedly by 2.0 percent, versus only a small gain in the County (0.2 percent) and an overall decline in the state (-0.4 percent). Another age group that differed from county and state figures was residents aged 35 to 54: in North Port, this group's percentage grew by 1.7 percent but declined in Sarasota County by 1.9 percent and in the state by 1.0 percent).

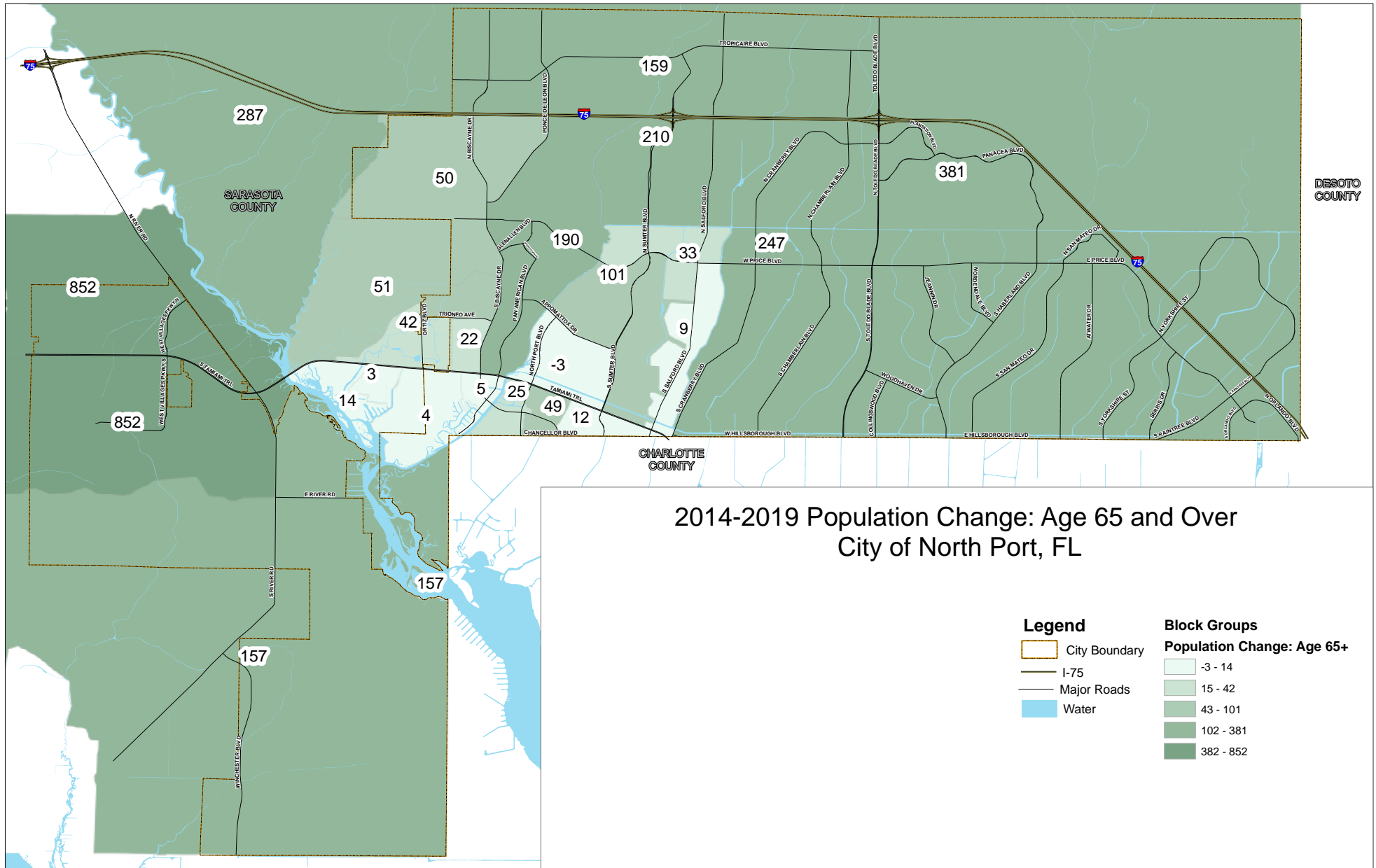
Figure 1.4e: Population By Age, 2000-2010

	% of 2000 Population	% Change 2000-2010	% of 2010 Population
<b>City of North Port</b>			
Ages 0-9	13.3%	-0.4%	12.9%
10-19	11.6%	+2.0%	13.5%
20-34	16.0%	-0.5%	15.6%
35-54	25.5%	+1.7%	27.2%
55-64	10.3%	+2.7%	13.0%
Ages 65+	23.4%	-5.5%	17.9%
Median Age	40.8	+0.2%	40.9
<b>Sarasota County</b>			
Ages 0-9	8.5%	-0.4%	8.0%
10-19	9.3%	0.2%	9.5%
20-34	12.4%	-0.1%	12.2%
35-54	25.6%	-1.9%	23.7%
55-64	12.8%	2.6%	15.4%
Ages 65+	31.5%	-0.3%	31.2%
Median Age	50.5	4.0%	52.5
<b>State of Florida</b>			
Ages 0-9	12.4%	-0.9%	11.5%
10-19	13.0%	-0.4%	12.5%
20-34	18.8%	-0.1%	18.7%
35-54	28.5%	-1.0%	27.5%
55-64	9.8%	2.7%	12.4%
Ages 65+	17.6%	-0.2%	17.3%
Median Age	38.7	5.2%	40.7

\*Source: US Census



Figure 1.4f: 2014-2019 Population Change: Age 65 and Over



Projected population by age obtained from ESRI Business Analyst for the year 2019 were also examined. ESRI data suggests that the 65 and older age group will experience the largest percentage growth between the years 2014 and 2019. Figure 1.4f illustrates where this increase is projected to occur in the City. It appears that the western portion of the City will experience the largest growth in this age group with areas in the east receiving less growth.

Figure 1.4g: Population By Age, 2014-2019

	% of 2014 Population	% Change 2014-2019	% of 2019 Population
City of North Port			
Ages 0-9	10.26%	-0.32%	9.94%
10-19	11.22%	-0.95%	10.27%
20-34	14.12%	+0.26%	14.38%
35-54	23.26%	-1.98%	21.28%
55-64	13.66%	+0.45%	14.12%
Ages 65+	27.47%	+2.54%	30.01%

\*Source: ESRI Business Analyst, 2015

**Age Implications:**

North Port has a growing proportion of middle-aged adults. This may lead to increased demand for bicycle and walking trails, arts and cultural events, and fitness programs and facilities such as yoga, walking clubs, and running events.

North Port has a markedly younger population than the rest of Sarasota County, particularly children ages 0-9. Recreation needs in the city will likely be more family-focused than in the surrounding area, such as higher demand for playgrounds, youth sports, summer camps, and after school programs.

Additionally, North Port will potentially see an increase in adults 65 and older between the years 2014 and 2019. This may lead to an increase in demand for senior programs and activities as well as additional transportation options.

### 1.4.3 Race/Ethnicity

The City of North Port's population is predominantly white (87.6 percent), but is trending towards greater diversity. Between 2000 and 2010, the percentage of white residents declined by 5.1 percent, whereas the percentage of Black or African-American residents rose 2.8 percent and Hispanics/Latinos grew by 5.5 percent. These figures are similar to the state of Florida's, but show greater movement towards diversity than that seen in Sarasota County between 2000 and 2010. Figure 1.4i illustrates the estimated spatial distribution of races and ethnicities in the City for the year 2014. It appears that minority populations are scattered throughout the City with few minority population concentrations.

#### *Race/Ethnicity Implications:*

The City of North Port is becoming a more ethnically diverse community, which may lead to evolving demand for programs and facilities. For example, studies have found that Hispanic/Latino parks users tend to want more soccer fields and facilities that can accommodate larger gatherings, such as large picnic pavilions.<sup>1</sup>

Increasing diversity is an opportunity to enrich department arts and cultural programming, and to bring disparate parts of the community together in city-wide events.

<sup>1</sup> Dwyer, J.F. (1993). Outdoor recreation participation: An update on Blacks, Whites, Hispanics, and Asians in Illinois. In P.Gobster (Ed.), Managing urban and high-use recreation settings (pp. 1991-1211).

**Table 1.4h: Population by Race/Ethnicity, 2000-2010**

	% of 2000 Population	% Change 2000-2010	% of 2010 Population
<b>City of North Port</b>			
White	92.7	-5.1	87.6
Black or African American	4.2	+2.8	7.0
American Indian and Alaska Native	0.2	+0.1	0.3
Asian	0.5	+0.7	1.2
Other Race	0.7	+1.1	1.8
Two or More Races	1.7	+0.5	2.2
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	3.2	+5.5	8.7
<b>Sarasota County</b>			
White	92.6	-1.6	91.0
Black or African American	4.2	-0.2	4.0
American Indian and Alaska Native	0.2	-0.1	0.1
Asian	0.8	+0.6	1.4
Other Race	1.1	+0.1	1.2
Two or More Races	1.0	+1.2	2.2
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	4.3	+3.7	8.0
<b>State of Florida</b>			
White	78.0	-3.0	75.0
Black or African American	14.6	+1.4	16.0
American Indian and Alaska Native	0.3	+0.1	0.4
Asian	1.7	+0.7	2.4
Other Race	3.0	+0.6	3.6
Two or More Races	2.4	+0.1	2.5
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	16.8	+5.7	22.5

\*Source: US Census



**2014 Dot Density Population (Race)**  
City of North Port, FL

**Legend**

- City Boundary
- I-75
- Major Roads
- Water
- 1 Dot = 10 People
- Race: White
- Race: Black
- Race: American Indian
- Race: Asian
- Race: Pacific
- Race: Hispanic

Note: Dots may appear in areas surrounding the City of North Port with limited or no population due to the organization of Census Tracts that straddle populated and unpopulated areas.



### 1.4.4 Household Types

The high growth rate of households in North Port between 2000 and 2010 (146.2 percent) reflects the absolute population growth during this period, and is significantly higher than Sarasota County's household growth rate (17.2 percent) and Florida's (17.1 percent).

In general, the types of households in North Port did not change dramatically between 2000 and 2010, except for a sharp decline in households with an individual over the age 65 years-old (-6.9 percent). Compared to Sarasota County as a whole, North Port has a substantially greater proportion of family households and households with individuals under the age of 18 years. This also translates into a higher average household size (2.48 people in North versus 2.13 in Sarasota County) and higher average family size (2.87 in North Port versus 2.61 in Sarasota County). Figure 1.4k illustrates the spatial distribution of family size throughout the City in the year 2014 with a clear concentration of large family size in the central portion of the City.

#### Household Type Implications:

The high percentage of family households and households with individuals aged 18 years or younger likely translates into a need for facilities and programs that can meet the recreation needs of children of all ages. More specifically, there is probably a relatively high demand for playgrounds, summer camp programming, swimming lessons, and other activities geared towards children. There is probably also demand for large parks that have "something for everyone," from young children to adults.

Figure 1.4j: Population by Household Type, 2000-2010

	2000 Population	% Change 2000-2010	2010 Population
<b>City of North Port</b>			
Total Households	9,111	+146.2%	22,431
% Family Households	72.8	-0.6	72.2
% Non-Family Households	27.2	+0.6	27.8
% Household with Own Children Under 18 Years	28.8	+0.8	29.6
% Households with Individuals Under 18 Years	31.4	+1.5	32.9
% Households with Individuals Over 65 Years	39.0	-6.9	32.1
Average Household Size	2.48	+0.1	2.55
Average Family Size	2.87	+0.1	2.95
<b>Sarasota County</b>			
Total Households	149,937	+17.2	175,746
% Family Households	63.0	-2.1	60.9
% Non-Family Households	37.0	+2.1	39.1
% Household with Own Children Under 18 Years	18.3	-1.2	17.1
% Households with Individuals Under 18 Years	20.1	-0.9	19.2
% Households with Individuals Over 65 Years	45.3	+0.9	46.2
Average Household Size	2.13	0.0	2.13
Average Family Size	2.61	+0.03	2.64
<b>State of Florida</b>			
Total Households	6,337,929	+17.1%	7,420,802
% Family Households	66.4	-1.2	65.2
% Non-Family Households	33.6	+1.2	34.8
% Household with Own Children Under 18 Years	28.1	-1.3	26.8
% Households with Individuals Under 18 Years	31.3	-1.5	29.8
% Households with Individuals Over 65 Years	30.7	+0.7	31.4
Average Household Size	2.46	+0.02	2.48
Average Family Size	3.0	+0.03	3.0

\*Source: US Census







### 1.4.5 Housing Occupancy

Between 2000 and 2010 the number of housing units in the City of North Port almost tripled, compared to a 25.2 percent increase county-wide, and a 23.1 percent increase state-wide. With this large jump in housing units, the percentage of vacant units rose by 8.2 percent — by 2010, almost 1 out of 5 units in the City of North Port was vacant, which is similar to the County-wide figure (23.1 percent).

One significant difference between North Port and Sarasota County is the percentage of units that are for seasonal, recreational or occasional use: in 2010, 59.5 percent of all units in Sarasota County were seasonal, versus only 0.1 percent in North Port. The City of North Port also has a higher proportion of housing units that are owner-occupied as opposed to renter-occupied. Figure 1.4m illustrates the spatial distribution of owner occupied housing units in the City with a clear concentration in the eastern portion of the City.

#### *Housing Occupancy Implications:*

High vacancy rates, such as those recorded in 2010, are usually a signal of real estate market instability. This often translates into community instability, where neighborhood turnover may be high and people may be less invested in their homes and community as a whole. With the economic recovery underway this vacancy rate has most likely decreased since 2010, however, there may be a need to enhance the sense of community. This can be partially accomplished through an investment in community amenities and places where people can gather.

Whereas Sarasota County has a high number of housing units devoted to tourists and seasonal residents, North Port has more full time residents who live there year-round. This likely translates into a need for year-round recreation programming, and facilities that can meet every-day recreation needs rather than those more associated with vacations, such as beaches and high-end special events.

**Table 1.4I: Population by Household Type, 2000-2010**

	2000 Population	% Change 2000-2010	2010 Population
<b>City of North Port</b>			
Total Housing Units	10,302	+171.7	27,986
% Housing Units Occupied	88.4	-8.2	80.2
% Housing Units Vacant	11.6	+8.2	19.8
% For Seasonal, Recreational, or Occasional Use	0.1	0.0	0.1
% Units Owner-Occupied	87.8	-12.1	75.7
% Units Renter-Occupied	12.2	+12.1	24.3
<b>Sarasota County</b>			
Total Housing Units	182,467	25.2	228,413
% Housing Units Occupied	82.2	-2.6	79.6
% Housing Units Vacant	17.8	+5.3	23.1
% For Seasonal, Recreational, or Occasional Use	62.9	-3.4	59.5
% Units Owner-Occupied	79.1	-4.1	75.0
% Units Renter-Occupied	20.9	+4.1	25.0
<b>State of Florida</b>			
Total Housing Units	7,302,947	23.1	8,989,580
% Housing Units Occupied	86.8	-4.3	82.5
% Housing Units Vacant	13.2	+4.3	17.5
% For Seasonal, Recreational, or Occasional Use	6.6	+0.7	7.3
% Units Owner-Occupied	70.1	-2.7	67.4
% Units Renter-Occupied	29.9	+2.7	32.6

\*Source: US Census





## 1.4.6 Household Income

Between 2000 and 2010, the median household income in North Port rose by 23.3 percent. This is a significantly larger rise than Sarasota County as a whole (15.0 percent) and the state of Florida (18.6 percent). With this increase, North Port has almost completely closed the income gap that was formerly present between city and county residents.

### *Household Income Implications:*

As households become wealthier, typically their recreation behaviors change as well. Increased household income can decrease demand for cities to provide free or discounted community services, such as after school care. Although a need for these programs will usually always be present, the demand for it may not be as great.

Additionally, households with increased income may be able to afford private recreation/fitness facilities and programs. With access to these private facilities and programs, they may not use some of the smaller, close-to-home city parks and recreation facilities such as pools, gyms, playgrounds, sports courts, etc. However, they may still have a need for larger and more unique facilities and events such as large community parks, sports complexes, trails and bikeways, water access, and community-wide events. These households may use these facilities or participate in these events and may place a higher emphasis on quality, responsiveness, and personal service.

**Table 1.4n: Population by Household Income, 2000-2010**

	% of 2000 Population	% Change 2000-2010	% of 2010 Population
<b>City of North Port</b>			
Median Household Income	\$36,560	23.3%	\$47,655
Less than \$10,000	8.8	-4.8	4.0
\$10,000 to \$14,999	5.6	-0.5	5.1
\$15,000 to \$24,999	16.6	-6.2	10.4
\$25,000 to \$34,999	16.5	-1.9	14.6
\$35,000 to \$49,999	23.2	-4.7	18.5
\$50,000 to \$74,999	19.5	2.2	21.7
\$75,000 to \$99,999	6.3	8.1	14.4
\$100,000 to \$149,999	2.6	5.0	7.6
\$150,000 to \$199,999	0.6	1.8	2.4
\$200,000 or more	0.2	1.2	1.4
<b>Sarasota County</b>	<b>37.0</b>	<b>+2.1</b>	<b>39.1</b>
Median Household Income	\$41,957	15.0%	\$49,388
Less than \$10,000	6.7	-1.2	5.5
\$10,000 to \$14,999	5.5	0.1	5.6
\$15,000 to \$24,999	14.2	-3.1	11.1
\$25,000 to \$34,999	14.3	-1.9	12.4
\$35,000 to \$49,999	18.3	-2.4	15.9
\$50,000 to \$74,999	19.4	-0.2	19.2
\$75,000 to \$99,999	8.9	2.7	11.6
\$100,000 to \$149,999	7.0	3.4	10.4
\$150,000 to \$199,999	2.1	1.6	3.7





	% of 2000 Population	% Change 2000-2010	% of 2010 Population
State of Florida	30.7	+0.7	31.4
Median Household Income	\$38,819	18.6	\$47,661
Less than \$10,000	9.6	-2.3	7.3
\$10,000 to \$14,999	6.7	-1.1	5.6
\$15,000 to \$24,999	14.5	-2.7	11.8
\$25,000 to \$34,999	14.2	-2.4	11.8
\$35,000 to \$49,999	17.4	-1.8	15.6
\$50,000 to \$74,999	18.5	0.4	18.9
\$75,000 to \$99,999	8.7	2.8	11.5
\$100,000 to \$149,999	6.3	4.2	10.5
\$150,000 to \$199,999	1.8	1.6	3.4
\$200,000 or more	2.3	1.3	3.6

\*Source: US Census



### 1.4.7 Density

The City of North Port is a low-density community, with a population of 1.2 people per acre. This density is fairly typical for suburban communities; in contrast, more urban cities such as Miami have densities of 60 people per acre or higher. Only 7.1 percent of housing units in North Port in 2010 were multi-family, compared to 25.0 percent in Sarasota County as a whole.

**Table 1.4o: Population Density, 2010- 2014**

	Area (acres)	2010 Density (Population/ Acre)	% Housing Units Multi-Family, 2010	% Change	2014 Estimate
<b>City of North Port</b>	47,872	1.2	7.1%	+5.26%	60,380
<b>Sarasota County</b>	355,840	1.1	25.0%	+4.62%	396,962
<b>State of Florida</b>	34,549,760	0.5	30.1%	+5.81%	19,893,297

\*Source: US Census

#### *Population Density Implications:*

Low population density is typically reflected by suburban-style development patterns, where each household has a private yard — sometimes of substantial size. Usually in these communities, residents meet their own close-to-home needs in their own yards, and/or are part Home Owners Associations (HOAs) that provide community facilities such as swimming pools, playgrounds, and tennis courts. This translates into a low demand for neighborhood level parks and facilities, but a greater demand for facilities that are not met by residential developments such as sports fields and large-scale special events.



## Summary of Key Findings

- The doubling of North Port's population between 2000 and 2010 has almost certainly resulted in an increased demand for parks and recreation facilities and services. Because of the magnitude of growth, there is a likely a significant need for all types of facilities and programs.
- North Port has a markedly younger population than the rest of Sarasota County, and a greater percentage of families. Recreation needs in the city will likely be more family-focused than in the surrounding area, such as demand for playgrounds, youth sports, summer camps, and after school programs. The high percentage of families will also likely translate into a need for parks that have "something for everyone," from toddlers to teenagers to adults.
- The City of North Port is becoming a more ethnically diverse community, which can impact the types of parks and recreation facilities demanded. For example, studies have found that Hispanic/Latino parks users tend to want more soccer fields and facilities that can accommodate larger gatherings, such as large picnic pavilions.
- ESRI Business Analyst population projection data suggest an increase in the 65 year and older population through the year 2019. The City should strive to provide "age-friendly" communities that meet senior residents' needs. Park-related elements of age-friendly communities include clean, pleasant, public areas; a sufficient number of well maintained, paved, wheelchair accessible paths; safe pedestrian crossings; separate cycle paths; good street lighting and signage; and reliable public transportation.
- High vacancy rates, such as those recorded in 2010, are usually a signal of community instability. With the economic recovery underway, this vacancy rate has likely decreased since 2010, but there may be a need to shore up the sense of community cohesion. Parks, recreation facilities and programs are an opportunity to support a strong sense of community through providing places where people can gather and interact, and feel invested in their immediate surroundings.
- Across almost all of the categories of demographic data, North Port's population bears more similarity to state-wide figures than to Sarasota

County. This distinction is important in that services and facilities provided by the County will not entirely reflect the needs of North Port residents. Conversely, City of North Port parks and recreation facilities and programs may attract more users—particularly families—from outside of its boundaries whose needs are not being met. One of the major differences between North Port and Sarasota County is the issue of seasonal users. Sarasota County has a high number of housing units devoted to tourists and seasonal residents, whereas North Port is more of an "every day" community populated by households that live there year-round. This likely translates into a need for year-round recreation programming, and facilities that can meet every-day recreation needs such as walking trails and multi-purpose open spaces.





## 1.5 Existing Plans

The parks and recreation master planning process does not happen in a vacuum. Instead, it builds off of the planning work of previous initiatives undertaken by the City of North Port. These completed plans can be organized into two categories: city parks planning documents and park specific master plans:

### City Parks Planning Documents

- City of North Port Comprehensive Plan Recreation and Support Documents (2008 & 2017)
  - Chapter 3-Transportation
  - Chapter 5-Conservation and Coastal Zone Management
  - Chapter 6-Recreation and Open Space
  - Chapter 11-Economic Development
- Canal and Creek System Master Plan (2010)
- Aquatic Facilities Master Plan (2010)
- City of North Port Parks and Recreation Master Plan (2006, not adopted)
- City of North Port Strategic Plan

### Park Specific Master Plans

- Atwater Park Splash Pad Concept (2014)
- Butler Park Pool (2010)
- Dallas White Park Conceptual Master Plan (2008)
- Myakkahatchee Creek Greenway Concept Plan (2007)
- Garden of the Five Senses Conceptual Master Plan (2003)
- West Villages 63 Acre Park (2008)

Following is a review of these documents and a discussion of their relevance to the Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

## 1.5.1 City Parks Planning Documents

### City of North Port Comprehensive Plan Recreation and Support Documents

Completed in 2008 and updated in June 2017, the City of North Port Comprehensive Plan provides a community-wide vision for growth and development. It contains eleven chapters, four of which — Transportation, Conservation and Coastal Zone Management, Economic Development and perhaps most significantly the chapter on Recreation and Open Space — have direct bearing on the Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

#### Chapter 3 – Transportation

The key goal from the Transportation chapter is to develop an effective multi-modal transportation system which optimizes safety, convenience, cost and pollution reduction practices by establishing internal and external transportation linkages between residential neighborhoods and activity centers.

The Transportation chapter encourages connections between neighborhoods via local roads or by linking the backside of neighborhoods at cul-de-sacs. These connections will limit the amount of traffic that is funneled to the collectors and arterials. Connectivity/linkages could include trail extensions, shared use paths, pedestrian bridges, traffic bridges, or a combination of both.

#### Chapter 5 – Conservation and Coastal Zone Management

The Conservation and Coastal Zone Management chapter evaluated the City's performance in terms of protecting sensitive species, natural and historic resources, coastal zone management, water quality, and hurricane evacuation. A major focus of the element is the Myakkahatchee Creek Greenway, which was identified as one of three “recreationally

and commercially important areas”. The other two areas with this designation were the Myakka State Forest and the Myakka River Basin.

Most of the chapter's policy goals and objectives do not directly address recreation, but Policy 3.9 did state that “Management activities for all City-owned outdoor recreation parks and facilities shall include, where appropriate and feasible, measures to restore and enhance degraded natural plant communities, habitat and natural hydrology”

### Chapter 11 – Economic Development

The Economic Development element is an optional element in North Port's Comprehensive Plan that was added in 2017. Goal 5, Objective 5.2 specifically addresses the relationship between quality of life and an economically stable community and supports initiatives to “enhance local attractions and recreational facilities to promote quality of life and tourism.”

### Chapter 6 – Recreation and Open Space

The Recreation and Open Space chapter was informed by findings from the 2005 Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR). Three significant needs identified by the EAR included the need for additional funding for park capital improvements; the development of a Parks and Recreation Master Plan; and the continuation of the Myakkahatchee Creek Greenway initiative. In total, the Recreation and Open Space chapter identifies \$36.8 million of improvements to City parks from 2010 to 2024 to be funded by the County-wide local option one percent infrastructure surtax.

A major policy element of the Recreation and Open Space chapter is the delineation of a park classification system, summarized in Figure 1.5a.



Figure 1.5a: Park Classifications

Park Type	Description
Neighborhood Park	A neighborhood park has an optimal size of 3-5 acres and serves as a recreational and social focus for neighborhoods. Typically this type of park has a ½ mile service radius.
Community Park	An aesthetically pleasing and safe “ride-to” park, located near major streets or arterials. It is designed to serve the needs of ten to fifteen neighborhoods, potentially serving a radius of up to three miles, or a population of 25,000 to 35,000 residents.
Special Use Facility	Special use facilities are designed for a special purpose or constituency group. They include, but are not necessarily limited to: softball, baseball and/or soccer complexes; dog parks; BMX facilities; model airplane fields; skateboard parks; aquatics centers; gymnastics centers; ice hockey rinks; equestrian centers; and other single-purpose, often competition-quality, facilities.
Greenway	A linear open space established along either a natural corridor, such as a riverfront, stream valley, or ridgeline, or over land along a railroad right-of-way converted to recreational use, a canal, a scenic road, or other route; any natural or landscaped course for pedestrian or bicycle passage; an open space connector linking parks, nature reserves, cultural features, or historic sites with each other and populated areas; or a local strip or linear park designated as a parkway or greenbelt.
Conservation Lands	Public lands maintained for continuing the sustainable yield of natural resources, including potable water, timber, game and sport fishing. Allowable activities include development of linear parks and greenways, wildlife relocation areas and improvements which are ancillary to the principal uses, including fire trails, or facilities which allow limited human access, such as unpaved parking spaces, primitive camping areas, canoe launches and sanitation facilities. No other uses may be permitted within Conservation Areas with the exception of the Winchester Boulevard hurricane evacuation route through the Myakka State Forest.
Open Space	Undeveloped public lands suitable for passive recreation and used primarily for parks, recreation, conservation, preservation of water resources, historic or scenic purposes, and greenways designed to buffer incompatible <u>land</u> uses.

Within the chapter, the City also established a level of service (LOS) goal of at least 10 acres of recreation/open space per 1,000 residents. The acreage goal was further specified as 1.5 acres of community parkland, 1.5 acres of open space, and 7.0 acres of conservation land per 1,000 residents.

To help reach these goals, the Recreation and Open Space chapter established the following goals for parkland acquisition and development:

- Community Parks**  
 The City shall pursue a proactive land assembly strategy to purchase, sell, barter, or enter into long-term lease agreements for the purpose of expanding existing or future community park sites.
- Parks and Open Space**  
 Where it is determined to be financially feasible, the City shall assemble lands for parks and open space that are adjacent to existing and proposed school sites and compatible City-owned properties.
- Greenways**  
 Where economically feasible, the City shall promote the procurement of greenways for the purpose of expanding linear parks by acquiring land necessary to link publicly owned conservation lands and recreation areas within and outside the City limits and coordinate any such linkages with other agencies providing parks located outside the City limits.



- **Interconnected System of Blueways, Greenways, Hiking Paths, and Sidewalks**

The City shall continue its efforts to create an interconnected network of blueways, greenways, hiking paths and sidewalks that links parks, open spaces, schools, commercial areas, and neighborhoods in order to create a pedestrian-and bicyclist-friendly environment.

- **Civic Gathering Space**

The City shall continue its efforts to create at least one large scale dedicated civic gathering space for special events and citywide activities to supplement the space present in the Government Center.

Other objectives identified by the Parks and Recreation Chapter include:

- Establish general priorities for the development of a community park system to meet the park and recreational needs of present and projected resident populations.
- Promote the development of a privately supported neighborhood-based park system to fulfill the recreation and open space desires of existing and future neighborhoods within the City.
- Coordinate with other public and private agencies to meet existing and projected community and regional park demand.
- The City will continue to coordinate with the County and its agents so that when viewed in their entirety, programs, facilities and activities are readily accessible to and usable by City residents. Further, the City will also

continue to coordinate with other local, state and federal agencies to provide public access to properties under their control.

- All new residential development within the City shall be required to continue to provide for their proportionate fair share of recreation areas via the impact fee ordinance and through the identification and development of open space necessary to accommodate the recreational needs of residents of such developments.
- Continue to negotiate with property owners to increase the number of recreation and open space areas necessary to meet existing and future demand based upon the adopted LOS standards.
- Establish Special Interest Parks and facilities to enhance the public's appreciation and enjoyment of the City's outstanding natural architectural and archaeological resource areas.
- Coordinate with other government agencies and the private sector to implement park acquisition, construction, maintenance, and preservation plans.
- Continue to work with Sarasota County, the State of Florida, and the private sector to identify and develop potential facilities to encourage eco-tourism in the City of North Port.

### 1.5.2 Aquatic Facilities Master Plan (2010)

In 2010, the City developed an Aquatic Facilities Master Plan. The plan assessed current conditions and needs to guide future programming, site selection, renovations, and new construction of aquatic facilities in North Port. Various alternative scenarios to address the need for aquatics facilities were developed and evaluated on the basis of the

effectiveness of response to the community's needs with likely capital costs, revenues, and expenditures.

To meet the aquatics need of the broader community, the majority of City Commissioners preferred a "Medium Family Aquatic Center" with options for phasing development. This would include a 25-yard by 25-meter lap pool and a separate leisure pool with two water slides, play feature, and lazy river. Butler Park was identified as the best location to meet current population needs.

For future development in the eastern and western sides of the city, "Small Family Aquatic Centers" were the preferred option. A therapy pool could be part of other complementary facilities, including Warm Mineral Springs, an existing or future senior center, or an activity center.

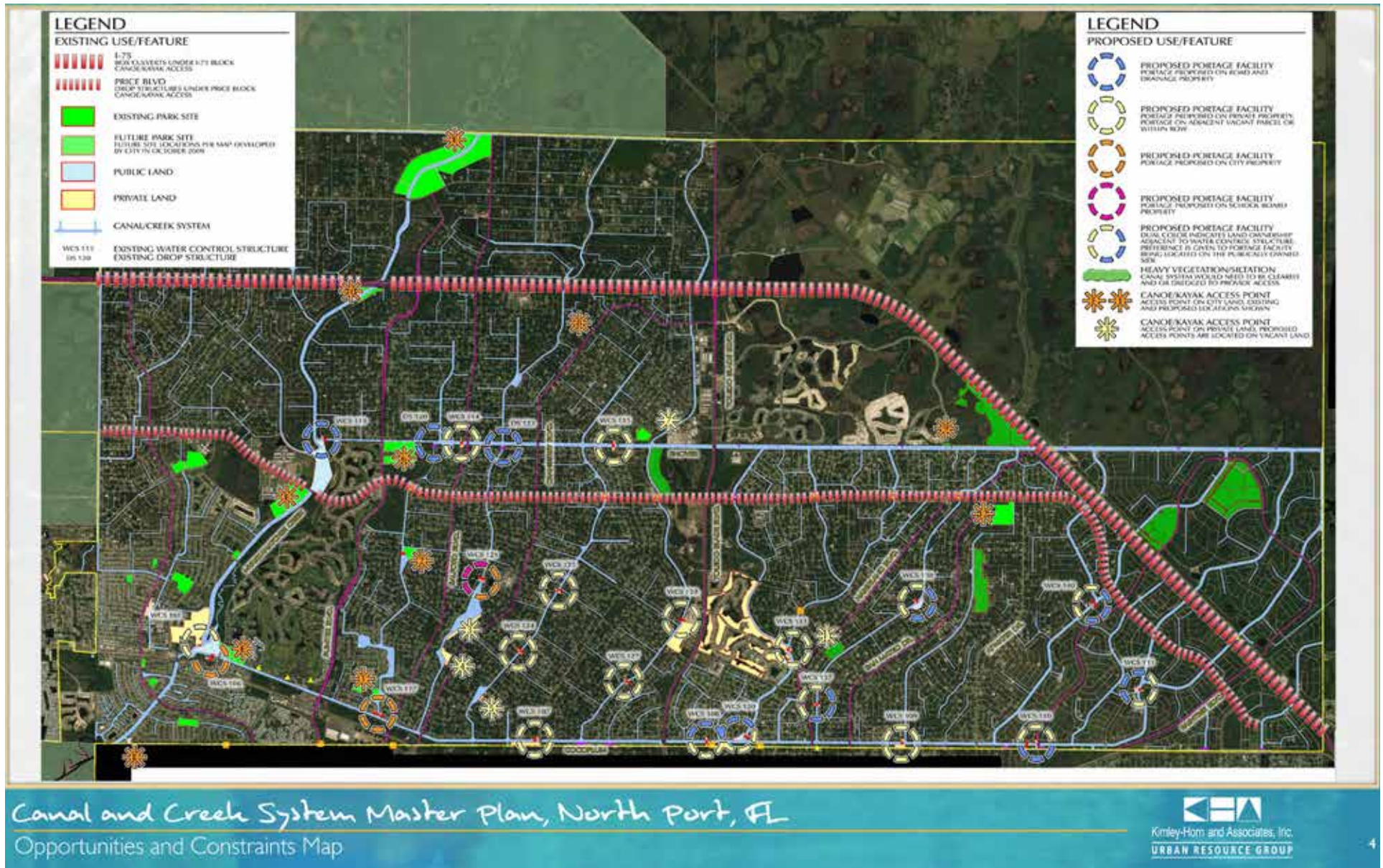
The Master Plan also recommended medium-sized pads with one or two vertical features at the Atwater Park, but other potential sites could include Dallas White, McKibben, and Blue Ridge. Additionally, the plan recommended that the existing pool at the YMCA remain, with options for redevelopment into a new type of aquatic facility in the future, and that small spraygrounds be built at existing park sites where feasible.

In response to developing a potential municipal water park, the preferred location was along the I-75 corridor. Amenities would include a large leisure pool with lazy river, multiple zero depth entries, four fitness lanes, flow rider, mat racer, bowl slide, and two family slides. The plan noted that the market for water parks in Florida is saturated, and if the City wished to move forward with the initiative it would need to pursue partnerships for the facility's funding and management. Since the completion of the Aquatic Facilities Master Plan, a splash pad was opened at Atwater Park in late 2015 and design for a Family Aquatic Center at Butler Park commenced in May 2017.





Figure 1.5b: Canal and Creek System Master Plan (2010)





### 1.5.3 Canal and Creek System Master Plan (2010)

The Canal and Creek Master Plan identifies opportunities for a comprehensive blueway system throughout North Port. The three main project goals are:

1. Connect various City parks and points of interest; to provide outdoor recreation;
2. Use the canal system to educate users on the lifecycle of stormwater;
3. Use of native landscaping, and removal of exotic/nuisance vegetation.

The extensive canal system has the potential to provide residents and visitors with great blueway connectivity, but many of the canals include water control structures that would require design solutions to make them navigable. To traverse the water control structures, the plan proposes a variety of portage facilities ranging from a floating dock type structure on the upstream and downstream side of the control structure to mechanical lifts used to accommodate larger electric boats that could link various commercial points of interest. The improvements at these control structures also include elements ranging from canoe/kayak launches, fishing piers, signage, enhanced landscaping and plantings.

The plan's proposed first phase includes developing portage facilities along the Cocoplum Waterway, Myakkahatchee Creek, and Blueridge Waterway. Once the first phase and a mechanism is in place to accommodate circulation around the control structures, the City opens itself up to a very unique opportunity of connection via the existing canal facilities. These canals will provide the opportunity for residents and visitors to navigate to various parks, shopping, City Hall, the Myakkahatchee Creek Greenway, and beyond. Phase 1 was completed in December 2015 and an additional launch site was installed behind City Hall on the Snover Waterway in 2017.

Figure 1.5c: Myakkahatchee Creek Gateway Concept Plan (2007)





### 1.5.4 City of North Port Myakkahatchee Creek Greenway Concept Plan (2007)

Myakkahatchee Creek traverses the City of North Port through its city center and has the potential to provide excellent pedestrian, blueway, and recreation opportunities for residents and visitors. The goals of this plan are to preserve critical environmental lands, provide a linear parkway, protect water quality, minimize floodplain encroachment, create wildlife corridors, and educate the community.

When presented with development alternatives, the City Commission at the time favored Concept Plan C, which would provide a variety of trail opportunities. The majority of these trails would be unpaved hiking trails along the creek, with bicycle trails limited to the portion of the creek between Price Boulevard and Appomattox Drive with existing bikeways along City streets providing connectivity to the surrounding areas. The concept illustrated key connections to the existing and future recreational, natural and/or cultural resources in the area, including six neighborhood parks, four community parks, three special/nature parks, and three other parks.

### 1.5.5 City of North Port Parks and Recreation Master Plan (2006, Not Adopted by City Commission)

While the City of North Port Commission did not adopt the previously developed Parks and Recreation Master Plan, the plan did provide many recommendations that were acknowledged by the Parks and Recreation Division. These recommendations included:

- Acquisition of land for recreational purposes
- Development of parks and recreational facilities and amenities that reflect the special needs of various constituencies
- Mid to long-term development of 10 to 12 new neighborhood parks
- Additional protection and development of public access to Little Salt Springs
- Development of a policy statement that requires developers to set aside land for public parks and open space as a precondition for development
- Development of an interconnected network of parks and open spaces for bike paths on roadways, pedestrian/bicycle bridges, sidewalks, and canal-rights-of-way.

The plan also established a build-out vision for the City that included parks, trails, greenways, and blueways. While many of these recommendation have been initiated, many have not and will need to be reevaluated as part of the current parks and open space planning process.

Figure 1.5d: City of North Port Parks and Recreation Master Plan (2006)






## Summary of Key Findings

These city-wide parks planning documents and park-specific plans provide a jumping off point for the 2015-2016 parks and recreation master

- The Atwater Splash Pad was completed late 2015. The first phase of the Myakkahatchee Creek Greenway is currently in the initial stages of implementation as is the design for the playground at the Garden of Five Senses. On May 22, 2017, City Commission instructed staff to move forward with design and development of a Family Aquatic Center at Butler Park, replacing the Butler Park Pool Conceptual Plan from 2010. The rest of the plans have not been implemented.

## Butler Park Pool/Family Aquatic Center Concept Plan (2017)

[illegible]

**Butler Park Pool**  
25 M x 25 YD Pool w/ Sprayground & Leisure Pool



Figure 1.5f: West Villages 63 Acre Park (2008)



2.0

# Needs + Priorities Assessment





## 2.0 Needs and Priorities Assessment

The purpose of a needs assessment is to determine the gaps between existing and desired conditions. However, there are no nationally accepted standards or criteria to evaluate the adequacy of a community's parks and recreation system. Similarly, there are no standard Level of Services (LOS) metrics provided by parks and recreation agencies. Each community must determine the appropriate LOS – including park land, facilities, amenities, programs, staffing, operations, and maintenance – required to meet the specific needs of its residents.

The City of North Port needs and priorities assessment incorporated a multi-pronged approach to identifying needs, meaning that various types of qualitative and quantitative techniques were used to identify top priorities from different perspectives. Qualitative needs assessment techniques included interviews, neighborhood workshops, focus group meetings, and an on-line survey. Quantitative needs assessment techniques included LOS analysis and a statistically valid survey. Findings from these different techniques were combined to determine top priority parks and recreation needs in the community. Following are the findings from each of the techniques based on conditions at the time of evaluation.

## 2.1 Site Evaluations

The planning team and City of North Port Parks and Recreation Division staff visited many of the City's parks to evaluate existing conditions during the summer of 2015. Findings are based solely on the conditions of the parks during these site visits. Twenty parks were evaluated using the following key criteria:

### ACCESS: Proximity, Access and Linkages

- *Visibility from a distance.* Can one easily see into the park?
- *Ease of walking to the park.* Can someone walk directly into the park safely and easily?
- *Transit access.* Is there a public transit stop nearby?
- *Clarity of information/signage.* Is there signage that identifies the park, and/or signage that provides additional information for users?
- *ADA Compliance.* Does the site generally appear to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) laws for accessibility?
- *Lighting.* Is the park lighted appropriately for use at night? (if applicable)

### COMFORT: Comfort and Image

- *First impression/overall attractiveness.* Is the park attractive at first glance?
- *Feeling of safety.* Does the park feel safe at the time of the visit?
- *Cleanliness/overall quality of maintenance.* Is the park clean and free of litter?
- *Comfort of places to sit.* Are there comfortable places to sit?
- *Protection from bad weather.* Is there shelter in case of bad weather?
- *Evidence of management/stewardship.* Is there visual evidence that the site is being managed and supervised?
- *Ability to easily supervise and manage the park or facility (interior).* How difficult it is to supervise the park and its facilities from inside the facility?
- *Condition and effectiveness of any equipment or operation systems.* Is the equipment and/or operating system in good condition?





## USE: Uses, Activities, and Sociability

- *Mix of uses/things to do.* Is there a variety of things to do given the type of park?
- *Level of activity.* How active is the park with visitors?
- *Sense of pride/ownership.* Is there evidence of community pride in the park?
- *Programming flexibility.* How flexible is the park in accommodating multiple uses?
- *Ability of facility to effectively support current organized programming.* Is the site meeting the needs of organized programs?
- *Marketing or promotional efforts for the facility.* Is the site being marketed effectively?

## SUSTAINABILITY: Environmental Sustainability

- *Stormwater management.* Is green infrastructure present to help manage stormwater?
- *Multi-modal capacity.* Is the park accessible by many modes of transportation?
- *Co-location/integration of infrastructure.* Does the park provide a number of community services other than parks and recreation services?
- *Facility energy efficiency.* Has the site been updated with energy efficient components?

## BUILDINGS: Buildings and Architecture (If a building is present on the site)

- *Image and aesthetics.* Is the building attractive?

- *Clarity of entry and connection to the park.* Is the building integrated into its surroundings?
- *Interior layout.* Is the layout functional?
- *Interior finishes, furniture, and equipment.* Are the furnishings and equipment inside the building of good condition and quality?
- *Functional dimensions of spaces.* Does the organization of space support the building's intended function?
- *Structural integrity.* Is the building safe?
- *Building enclosure.* Is there any obvious need for repairs to the building shell?
- *Building systems.* Are all mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems in working order?
- *Code compliance.* Does the building meet code?
- *Energy and sustainability.* Is there evidence that the building is energy efficient?

Each of the sites was scored on the above questions using a scale of 1 to 5:

- 1.0 – 1.9 = Well Below Expectations**
- 2.0 – 2.9 = Not Meeting Expectations**
- 3.0 – 3.9 = Meets Expectations**
- 4.0 – 4.9 = Exceeds Expectations**
- 5.0 + = Far Exceeds Expectations**

Each whole number represents a performance tier. Scores were assigned based on an evaluation of the site and the buildings compared to other sites in the city. Although the process of scoring is inherently subjective, multiple evaluators, including Parks and Recreation Division staff were present to discuss each score and reach consensus. The purpose of the scoring was to establish an understanding of how the parks rates in terms of quality and its ability to serve users. Figure 2.1b provides a summary chart of the park system's average scores.

Overall, the City has made impressive progress in improving the appearance of its parks since the completion of the previous parks and recreation master plan in 2006.

Figure 2.1a show images of various parks taken in the fall of 2005 in comparison to images taken in the summer of 2015. After 10 years, it is evident that the City and the Parks and Recreation Division have worked hard in enhancing the quality and appearance of the City's park system.

However, there is always room for improvement. Almost all of the City's parks scored in the range of 2.0 – 2.9 (not meeting expectations) to 3.0 – 3.9 (meets expectations); the system-wide average score was 3.0. Exceptions included Butler Park & Morgan Center Campus (exceeded expectations), Marius Park (well below expectations), and Warm Mineral Springs (well below expectations).

Common limitations across multiple parks in North Port's system include poor connectivity to surrounding sidewalk networks, very little shade in the parks and along the sidewalks leading to the park, limited things to do in the parks, and limited multi-modal access to community-level facilities.

The criteria with the most room for improvement included "SUSTAINABILITY: Environmental Sustainability" (average score 2.7) and "ACCESS: Proximity, Access and Linkages" (average score 2.9). These scores are typical of suburban parks and recreation system that have traditionally focused on recreation facilities rather than addressing larger environmental issues. These communities also commonly prioritize vehicular access over bicycle, pedestrian, and/or transit access.

Buildings also scored poorly in some of the City's older parks, such as the Skate Park, as opposed to

the newer buildings at the Morgan Center and the Mullen Center. Similarly, the North Port pool and Family YMCA buildings at Dallas White Park appear to be outdated and in poor condition, especially compared with the new, adjacent police/ fire station on North Port Boulevard.

The pages following Figure 2.1b- Site Evaluation Summary contain an overview of each of the 21 parks evaluated. The numbers in parentheses indicate the park's score in that category's criteria. The call-out boxes contain comments gathered from residents and stakeholders during community meetings related to what specific improvements they would like to see implemented in the park.

**Figure 2.1a: Park Improvements Over the Last 10 Years**

**Blue Ridge Park**



*Conditions in 2005*

**Highland Ridge Park**



**McKibben Park**



*Improved Conditions in 2015*





Table 2.1b: Site Evaluation Summary

Parks	Atwater Park	Blue Ridge Park	Butler Park	Canine Club	City Hall Garden and Courtyard	Dallas White Park	Garden of the 5 Senses	George Mullen / Larry Thoenissen Fields	Highland Ridge Park	Hope Park	Kirk Park	La Brea	Marina Park	Marius Park	McKibben Park	Narramore Sports Complex	Pine Park	Skate Park	Sumter Linear Park – South	Veterans Day Park	Warm Mineral Springs Park	Average Score
ACCESS: Proximity, Access and Linkages	3.2	2.3	3.7	2.5	2.3	3.2	2.8	2.5	3.7	2.0	2.8	2.8	2.8	1.8	2.8	2.3	3.0	3.5	4.5	3.5	1.7	2.9
Visibility from a distance	2	3	4	2	3	3	4	2	5	2	4	4	5	3	4	3	4	4	5	5	2	3.5
Ease of walking to the park	4	3	3	2	2	4	2	1	4	2	4	4	3	3	4	3	4	3	5	2	1	3.0
Transit access	1	1	4	1	4	4	1	4	3	2	3	2	1	1	1	1	2	4	4	4	1	2.4
Clarity of information/signage	2	2	2	2	1	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	4	3	2	2.1
ADA Compliance	5	2	5	4	2	3	4	2	4	1	1	1	2	1	2	2	2	4	4	4	1	2.7
Lighting (if applicable)	5	3	4	4	2	3	3	4	4	3	3	4	4	2	4	3	4	4	5	3	3	3.6
COMFORT: Comfort and Image	4.2	3.5	4.5	3.8	2.7	2.8	4.0	3.4	4.5	3.0	3.2	2.8	3.0	1.5	3.7	2.5	3.5	2.2	4.2	3.3	2.3	3.3
First impression/overall attractiveness	5	3	4	4	2	3	4	4	4	3	3	2	2	1	4	3	3	1	4	4	3	3.2
Feeling of safety	4	3	4	4	4	3	4	3	5	3	4	4	4	2	4	2	4	2	5	4	4	3.7
Cleanliness/overall quality of maintenance (exterior)	5	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	5	3	3	3	3	1	4	2	4	2	4	4	1	3.6
Cleanliness/overall quality of maintenance (interior)	-	-	5	-	-	4	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	3	3.8
Comfort of places to sit	4	3	3	4	1	3	4	2	4	3	3	2	2	2	3	2	3	2	4	3	5	3.0
Protection from bad weather	2	4	4	4	1	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	3	1	3	2	3	2	4	1	3	2.9
Evidence of management/stewardship (exterior)	5	4	5	3	4	3	5	4	5	3	3	3	4	2	4	4	4	2	4	4	1	3.6
Evidence of management/stewardship (interior)	-	-	5	-	-	2	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	3	3.4
Ability to easily supervise and manage the park or facility (interior)	-	-	5	-	-	1	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	1	2.4
Condition and effectiveness of any equipment or operation systems	-	-	5	-	-	2	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	1	2.8
USE: Uses, Activities, and Sociability	2.8	3.7	4.7	3.3	2.7	3.0	2.5	3.7	4.5	2.2	2.5	2.2	2.5	1.3	3.7	2.5	3.0	2.7	3.2	2.5	2.7	3.0
Mix of uses/things to do	2	4	5	2	1	4	2	4	5	2	3	2	2	1	4	2	3	2	3	1	2	2.7
Level of activity	1	3	5	4	1	3	2	4	5	1	1	1	1	1	3	4	1	2	3	1	5	2.4
Sense of pride/ownership	5	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	2	3	2	4	1	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	3.6
Programming flexibility	2	4	5	3	3	4	3	4	5	3	3	3	2	2	4	2	4	2	3	2	2	3.1
Ability of facility to effectively support current organized programming	4	4	5	4	4	3	2	4	5	3	3	3	3	2	4	1	4	4	3	4	2	3.5
Marketing or promotional efforts for the facility	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	3	1	3	2	3	3	3	3	1	2.7

Parks	Atwater Park	Blue Ridge Park	Butler Park	Canine Club	City Hall Garden and Courtyard	Dallas White Park	Garden of the 5 Senses	George Mullen / Larry Thoenissen Fields	Highland Ridge Park	Hope Park	Kirk Park	La Brea	Marina Park	Marius Park	McKibben Park	Narramore Sports Complex	Pine Park	Skate Park	Sumter Linear Park – South	Veterans Day Park	Warm Mineral Springs Park	Average Score
<b>SUSTAINABILITY: Environmental Sustainability</b>	3.3	3.0	3.8	2.3	3.5	3.3	3.3	3.8	3.0	2.5	2.0	2.5	1.5	1.8	2.5	3.0	2.5	2.8	4.0	2.8	1.5	2.8
Stormwater management	4	3	4	3	3	3	4	3	4	3	2	3	1	3	3	3	3	3	5	3	3	3.2
Multi-modal capacity	2	2	3	2	4	4	2	4	3	3	2	3	2	1	3	2	3	2	3	2	1	2.6
Co-location/integration of infrastructure	3	4	4	2	5	4	4	4	3	2	2	2	1	1	2	4	2	4	4	4	1	2.9
Facility energy efficiency	4	3	4	2	2	2	3	4	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	4	2	1	2.5
<b>BUILDINGS: Buildings and Architecture (If a building is present on the site)</b>	-	-	5.0	-	-	2.4	-	4.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.7	3.4
Image and aesthetics			5			2		5													1	3.3
Clarity of entry and connection to the park			5			3		4													4	4.0
Interior layout			5			3		4													4	4.0
Interior finishes, furniture, and equipment			5			2		5													1	3.3
Functional dimensions of spaces			5			2		4													1	3.0
Structural integrity			5			3		5													1	3.5
Building enclosure			5			3		4													1	3.3
Building systems			5			2		4													1	3.0
Code compliance			5			2		4													2	3.3
Energy and sustainability			5			2		4													1	3.0
<b>Total System Average</b>	3.4	3.1	4.3	3.0	2.8	2.9	3.1	3.5	3.9	2.4	2.6	2.6	2.5	1.6	3.2	2.6	3.0	2.8	4.0	3.0	2.0	3.0





## Atwater Park

**Park Classification: Recreational/Sports Facility**  
**Overall Average Park Score: 3.4 out of 5.0**

### *Proximity, Access, and Linkages (3.2)*

Atwater Park is the only developed park in eastern North Port. One of the park's boundaries is shared with Atwater Elementary School while the rest of the edges are shared with the backyards of single-family home lots, many of which are currently undeveloped. Typical of suburban communities, this location limits natural surveillance and "eyes into the park." The park is currently accessible through a park road off of Skyway Avenue to the east. There is no direct connection to the elementary school to the west. The park access road does, however, have a wide multi-purpose path that facilitates bicycle and pedestrian access into the park from Skyway Avenue. The neighborhood streets leading to the park do not have any sidewalks or shade trees. Signage in the park is limited to identification and regulatory signage.

### *Comfort and Image (4.2)*

Atwater Park is one of the City of North Port's newest parks. Built in 2012, park amenities appear to be in good condition and the park is maintained well. A shelter for protection during inclement weather is provided by pavilions near the park entrance, the covered bleachers, and the concessions facility when it is open.

### *Uses, Activities and Sociability (2.8)*

As a Recreational/Sports Facility, Atwater Park is athletics-focused and caters to baseball leagues. The City is currently in the process of completing a splash pad and playground with interactive features. This will help add more uses and activities to the park. There appears to be some space along the eastern part of the property to develop additional facilities.

### *Sustainability: Environmental Sustainability (3.3)*

As a new park, Atwater Park appears to be one of the few facilities in the system using energy efficient systems. Stormwater management is integrated into the park's design through the multi-use path entrance into the park; however, other portions of the park do not incorporate stormwater management treatment into the overall aesthetic, experience, and activities of the park. The park has multi-modal access through the excellent pedestrian and bicycle path located at the entrance of the park but connectivity is limited by the lack of strong pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure in the surrounding area. There are also no bus stops or routes located near the park.

#### What Residents Said They Want in the Park:

- Add another big field
- Add a playground



#### What Residents Said They Want in the Park:

- Provide an opportunity to rent boats or paddle boats for those who can't use a kayak
- Add a Community garden
- Add a path through wooded areas
- Fence around lake for children's safety

## Blue Ridge Park

### Park Classification: Neighborhood

Overall Average Park Score: 3.0 out of 5.0

#### *Proximity, Access, and Linkages (2.3)*

Blue Ridge Park is a neighborhood park located on the western edge of a residential neighborhood along the Blue Ridge Waterway. Most of the park is comprised of forested land with a few active uses including a playground, floating dock, open play area, and a shelter. Most of these active uses are located towards the front of the park and have good visibility from the street. While the park is surrounded by low traffic residential streets, there are no sidewalks with shade trees leading up to the park. Signage in the park is limited to identification and regulatory signage.

#### *Comfort and Image (3.5)*

Overall, Blue Ridge Park presents a positive first impression. The park is well maintained, provides some seating options, contains a shelter for protection from inclement weather, a playground structure that is partially shaded, and a restroom building. While the park is tucked into the neighborhood, good visibility from the road fosters a feeling of safety for park users.

#### *Uses, Activities and Sociability (3.7)*

The park includes amenities typically found in a neighborhood park with a few added resource-based recreation opportunities. These include a playground, open play area, shelter, picnic area, and grills. The park's location adjacent to the canal and the relatively gradual and well maintained slopes along the canal's banks appear to provide good fishing opportunities. The forested and undeveloped land within the park may also provide opportunities to add new activities in the park should the surrounding neighborhood desire them.

#### *Sustainability: Environmental Sustainability (3.0)*

Blue Ridge Park is a relatively undeveloped neighborhood park. The park is comprised almost entirely of pervious surfaces. Stormwater infiltrates naturally into the ground or drains into the adjacent canal. While the park lacks multi-modal connectivity to the surrounding area, it does have a floating dock that facilitates canoe/kayak access to the park.







#### What Residents Said They Want in the Park:

- Build aquatics facility (6 votes)
- Open longer hours, weekends, and holidays (5 votes)
- Add more programs for seniors (4 votes)
- Add an Olympic size pool for high school and middle school practice/competitions (2 votes)
- Salt water pool
- Aquatics facility is too costly
- Expanded walking trails
- Provide games, cards, chess, grandparent clubs, etc.
- Add lighted rectangle fields
- Add kayak launch site as well as kayak locking area
- Expand parking lot
- Add a remote control track
- Add a youth football complex
- Provide basketball events for both youth and adults
- Add a concession/dining area
- Provide less free activities for kids
- Add a frisbee golf course

## Butler Park + Morgan Family Community Center

**Park Classification: Community/Activity Center**  
**Overall Average Park Score: 4.3 out of 5.0**

### *Proximity, Access, and Linkages (3.7)*

Butler Park is in a central location in the eastern part of the City. The park is adjacent to Heron Creek Middle School and North Port High School, and is situated along one of the City's major east-west thoroughfares and transit routes. While park amenities are set back from the road, they have good visibility from the street. The streets leading to the park have sidewalks, however direct sidewalk connections from the schools to the park are limited and have no shade trees. Once in the park, there are no sidewalk connections to the park's athletic fields from the surrounding sidewalk network. There is however, good access from the surrounding sidewalk network to the park's community center. The Myakkahatchee Creek Greenway borders the park on the east. Once developed, the greenway will enhance the parks connectivity to the surrounding community. Signage is limited to identification signage and regulatory signage.

### *Comfort and Image (4.5)*

Butler Park can be divided into two spaces: the athletic fields to the north and the Morgan Family Community Center and associated outdoor facilities to the south. The athletic fields are aged and tired. While the grounds are well maintained by Sarasota County, the facility appears to be at the end of its life cycle and needs capital improvements to enhance its curb appeal. The Morgan Family Community Center and its associated outdoor facilities, on the other hand, provide a great first impression. They are relatively new and very well maintained. The Center is designed to allow for good surveillance and

fosters "eyes on the park." Similar to other parks in the system, there are limited shade trees or shelters throughout the park.

### *Uses, Activities and Sociability (4.7)*

Uses, activities and sociability vary in Butler Park. The athletic portion of Butler Park is only used during organized sports events. The Center, by contrast, is actively used and serves as one of the City's hubs for parks and recreation activities. The park's location adjacent to two of the City's largest schools helps increase activity levels. The 33,000 square foot center provides residents of all ages with a variety of programs and activities year round. While most of the spaces remain active, the multi-purpose rooms are not used as frequently.

### *Sustainability: Environmental Sustainability (3.8)*

Environmental sustainability in Butler Park varies by location. Sustainability practices in the older athletic section of the park are limited but are prevalent in the newer portion of the park. While stormwater management is addressed in the park, it is not integrated into the overall aesthetic, experience, and activities of the park.

### *Buildings: Buildings and Architecture (5.0)*

Built in 2011, the Morgan Family Community Center is the City of North Port's newest community center building and scored a perfect "5.0" in its evaluation criteria. The building provides visitors with a great first impression: it is well maintained, offers a variety of high quality and functional spaces, has first class amenities and facilities, and is energy efficient.



## Canine Club

### Park Classification: Special Use

Overall Average Park Score: 3.0 out of 5.0

#### *Proximity, Access, and Linkages (2.5)*

The Canine Club has limited visibility from the street because of its setback from the road and the presence of a landscaped mound that buffers its parking lot. Although there is a sidewalk located across the street from the park, there is no safe pedestrian crossing and no shade trees along neighborhood sidewalks leading to the park. There is no transit access to the park, and signage is limited to identification and regulatory signage.

#### *Comfort and Image (3.8)*

Overall, the park has an acceptable first impression. While the site is generally well maintained, heavy use has taken a toll on the park, specifically the ground cover. Parts of both dog corrals have degraded into dirt patches that detract from the overall beauty of the park and negatively affect users' experiences. Various pavilions throughout the park provide sufficient shelter from poor weather, and while there are many places to sit, the mismatched look of the seating detracts from the overall attractiveness of the park.

#### *Uses, Activities and Sociability (3.3)*

Because the Canine Club is a special use facility focused on providing a quality dog park experience, others uses are limited. It is one of the City's most popular facilities, and is typically very active and busy. The downside of the park's high activity levels is the increased need for maintenance to keep the park clean and attractive.

#### *Sustainability: Environmental Sustainability (2.3)*

Like other parks in North Port's system, the Canine Club does not currently integrate stormwater management into its overall design and activities. Also like other parks, access to the park is essentially limited to driving, as there is no transit or pedestrian access and limited bicycle access.

#### What Residents Said They Want in the Park:

- More shade (2 votes)
- Add fountain, pool, and hose to cool off dogs (2 votes)
- Add vending machines
- Add lights
- Add agility course
- Add splash pool
- Add soil around main structure
- Don't shut down park for long periods of time, allow at least limited access
- There are too many trees, no more trees
- Add more grass, less sand
- Add better gravel
- Extend entrance
- Better gates with better latches
- Need appropriate pavilion, better drainage, a "hosing platform" 10-15 feet wide





#### What Residents Said They Want in the Park:

- Canal somehow included in view from activity area
- Kayak/canoe launch
- Build a permanent stage/amphitheater
- Utilize for more events
  - Movies in the lawn
  - Concerts
  - Chili cook-off
  - Mac & Cheese event

## City Center Front Green & Courtyard

**Park Classification: Special Use**

**Overall Average Park Score: 2.8 out of 5.0**

### *Proximity, Access, and Linkages (2.3)*

The space is comprised of two spaces: the City Center Front Green which is located in front of City Hall in between two access roads to City Hall, and the courtyard located behind City Hall. While the Front Green has great visibility, the courtyard is located behind City Hall and has limited visibility from the front of the building. These spaces function more as open green spaces that are used only during programmed events—there is no signage, wayfinding, amenities, or facilities that would identify the spaces as parks. Access to the spaces is good, as they are located next to one of the City's major bus transit hubs and have strong sidewalk access from the neighborhood.

### *Comfort and Image (2.7)*

The City Center Front Green and Courtyard are maintained as open spaces. They do not offer any amenities or facilities, no places to sit, and no protection from inclement weather.

### *Uses, Activities and Sociability (2.7)*

If there are no activities planned for the spaces, then there is typically nothing to do in the spaces. Since the spaces are open and have access to electrical outlets, they provide good flexibility for hosting events. The City Hall Front Green was designed more as a decorative greenspace/ stormwater detention facility than a functional greenspace which may hinder the experience of a programmed event. There is no pedestrian circulation network within the Front Green, nor are there sitting areas, shade, or other basic amenities typically found in multi-use spaces.

### *Sustainability: Environmental Sustainability (3.5)*

Besides the periodic basic maintenance of mowing the lawn, trimming trees, and watering, both spaces require limited additional attention. Stormwater infiltrates through pervious surfaces in the courtyard and in swales along the edges of the Front Green. The spaces' co-location with City Hall promotes an effective use of space and public investment, and they benefit from the lighting of the surrounding parking lots.





## Dallas White Park

**Park Classification: Community Activity Center**  
**Overall Average Park Score: 2.9 out of 5.0**

### *Proximity, Access, and Linkages (3.2)*

Dallas White Park has a central location in the western part of the city, and in general has good access and visibility. Sidewalk connectivity to the surrounding neighborhoods is good, but there is a lack of shade trees. The park is also located along a transit route with a stop nearby. Signage is limited to identification and regulatory signage.

### *Comfort and Image (2.8)*

Dallas White Park is the oldest park in the system. Despite its age, the park gives an acceptable first impression and is well-maintained. It is apparent that the park has benefited from recent capital improvements, such as the playground structure and surface. However, some of the other recreational facilities are approaching the end of their life cycle and need to be updated. These include the boat docks, parking lot, and the Scout House. The Scout House in particular appears to be in need of improvements, and would benefit from being better integrated with the rest of the park.

### *Uses, Activities and Sociability (3.0)*

The park provides a mix of uses including a playground, sand volleyball court, softball field, picnic tables, small community center, picnic areas, and a boat ramp. While the park is active during programmed events, it appears that it is less well-used at other times. Facilities and parking appear to be sufficient for events that are currently programmed at the site.

### *Sustainability: Environmental Sustainability (3.3)*

While most of the park drains into the adjacent canal, treatment of stormwater in other parts of the park lack integration with the overall experience, aesthetic, activities of the park. However, the park does have good multi-modal access, with access available by driving, walking, bicycling, riding transit, and boating.

### *Buildings: Buildings and Architecture (2.4)*

The Scout House is a small structure in the eastern portion of the park that is small and utilitarian in appearance. The quality of the facility is markedly lower than newer civic buildings in North Port such as City Hall, the fire station, and other parks' community centers.

### **What Residents Said They Want in the Park:**

- Add more events such as: (3 votes)
  - Movies in the pool
  - Concerts
- Add a canoe/kayak slip (3 votes)
- Build a permanent stage/amphitheater (2 votes)
- Provide pedal boat rentals and possibly tour boats
- Add a dog park
- Relocate/renovate the Scout House
- Improve exercise equipment along trail
- Dogs should be able to walk trail
- Add smaller pavilions or designated areas for birthday parties rather than picnic tables spread throughout the park
- Increase the number of restroom facilities/family rooms to change





#### What Residents Said They Want in the Park:

- Love the gardening related classes they offer in the park once a month
- Provide more classes
- Area is too small for proposed large/big dog park
- Large pavilion for gatherings

## Garden of the Five Senses

### Park Classification: Special Use Facility

Overall Average Park Score: 3.1 out of 5.0

#### *Proximity, Access, and Linkages (2.8)*

Located towards the center of a residential neighborhood, the Garden of the Five Senses is screened by a large black fence and shrubs, limiting visibility into the park. While there is good sidewalk connectivity within the park, there are no sidewalk connections to the surrounding neighborhood. There are also no bus stops or transit routes near the park. Signage includes identification, regulatory, and environmental education signage.

#### *Comfort and Image (4.0)*

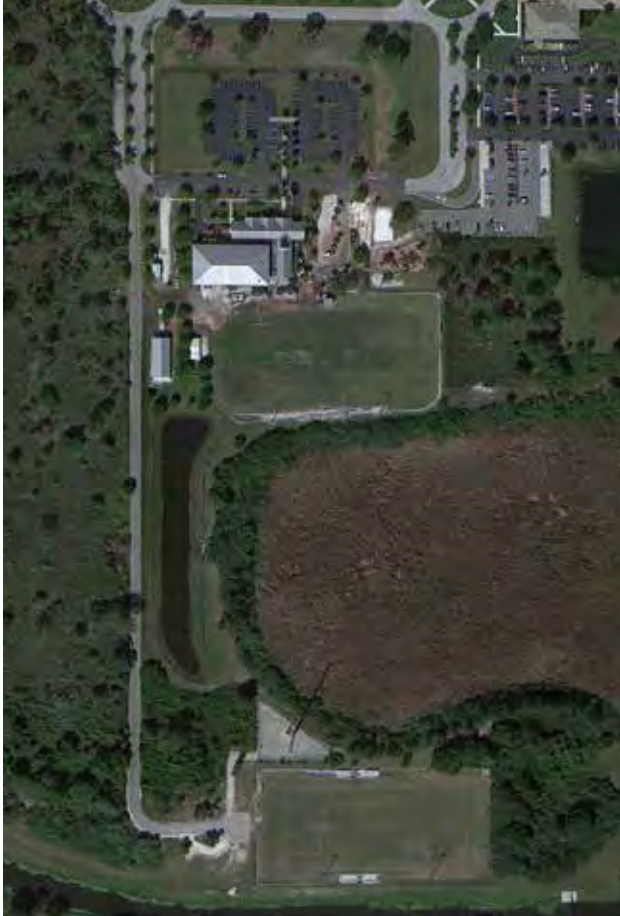
The park provides a great first impression and is very well maintained. It is a popular setting for wedding photos, and there are multiple options for seating and protection from bad weather.

#### *Uses, Activities and Sociability (2.5)*

The Garden of the Five Senses is primarily a passive park with opportunities for strolling and sitting. This experience is augmented by public art and environmental education installations. A large portion of the park remains wooded and contains a network of natural hiking trails. The series of dry detention canals in the park limit the activities and facilities that can be programmed on the site.

#### *Sustainability: Environmental Sustainability (3.3)*

Roughly ¼ of the park is developed while the rest of the park is comprised of dry detention canals and forested areas. The portion of the park that is developed drains into the pre-existing canals and employs pervious pavement in key areas that helps with stormwater management. The Garden of the Five Senses lacks multi-modal access, and is primarily accessed only by car.



## George Mullen Community Center / Larry Thoennissen Fields

**Park Classification: Community/Activity Center**  
**Overall Average Park Score: 3.5 out of 5.0**

### *Proximity, Access, and Linkages (2.5)*

George Mullen Community Center has good visibility from the Government Complex but less visibility from the street. Larry Thoennissen Fields are located to the east and have mixed visibility: one field is located behind the community center and enjoys acceptable visibility but the second field is located further away from the community center behind a wetland facility and surrounded by forested areas. Both the community center and Larry Thoennissen Fields have good sidewalk access that links well to the surrounding neighborhood, but few shade trees. Because of their location next to the City of North Port Government Complex, the facilities have access to a major bus transit hub, however parking can be a challenge during major events. Signage is limited to identification signage and regulatory signage.

### *Comfort and Image (3.4)*

The George Mullen Community Center is a relatively new facility—it is very well maintained and provides visitors with a great first impression. The fields are well-maintained as well, but the bleachers lack shade, and there are few other options for seating. Due to the location of the fields, it is difficult to monitor and supervise the fields from the community center. Unimproved parking opportunities for the Larry Thoennissen Fields lead to users parking along the grass, which causes maintenance issues and detracts from the overall appearance of the park.

### *Uses, Activities and Sociability (3.7)*

Together, the George Mullen Community Center and Larry Thoennissen Fields provide visitors with a variety of activities and uses including a gymnasium, arts room, multi-purpose room, an outdoor garden, a playground, and athletic fields. While the park can host a variety of programs, parking for the athletic fields is limited, which makes it inconvenient for users. With the exception of inadequate parking, there appears to be sufficient space around the fields for programmed events.

### *Sustainability: Environmental Sustainability (3.8)*

Most of the park drains into a forested wetland in between the community center and athletic fields. Other parts of the park drain into traditional dry detention swales which are not integrated into the overall aesthetic, experience, or activities of the park. The best characteristic of the facilities in terms of sustainability is their location near a major transit hub, which provides strong multi-modal access.

### *Buildings: Buildings and Architecture (4.3)*

The George Mullen Activity Center is another major hub of activity for the City's Parks and Recreation Division, and also serves as the City's emergency shelter. The building is well-maintained, makes a good first impression, and provides visitors with a variety of high quality and functional spaces, first class amenities and facilities, and energy-efficient and sustainable systems.

### What Residents Said They Want in the Park:

- Open every day and holidays
- Teach Pickleball, games, card clubs and chess teams
- Foot bridge from Tripoli to City Center Boulevard
- Provide more parking
- Provide better restrooms
- Add a canoe/kayak launch
- Add a back field
- Add another football field







## Highland Ridge Park

**Park Classification: Neighborhood Park**

**Overall Average Park Score: 3.9 out of 5.0**

### *Proximity, Access, and Linkages (3.7)*

Located towards the center of a residential neighborhood in the southwestern portion of the city, Highland Ridge Park is one of the City's best examples of a neighborhood park. It is one of the few parks in the City where residential homes face the park and provide "eyes on the park," and visibility into the park from the surrounding area is excellent. However, there are no sidewalks that directly connect to the park. Signage is limited to identification signage and regulatory signage.

### *Comfort and Image (4.5)*

The park provides a great first impression and is very well maintained. Natural surveillance from surrounding homes that face the park foster a feeling of safety in the park, and there are sufficient options for seating and protection from bad weather.

### *Uses, Activities and Sociability (4.5)*

The park offers a variety of activities for residents of all ages. Facilities include a playground, shuffleboard courts, shelter, basketball courts, racquet ball courts, pickleball courts, multi-purpose open space, and a restroom. Despite these many facilities, the park is large enough to allow for a variety of activities to happen at the same time without an impact to the quality of the recreation experience.

### *Sustainability: Environmental Sustainability (3.0)*

Highland Ridge Park did not score high in terms of sustainability. Most of the park is comprised of impervious surface and drains naturally or into a series of dry retention swales. Other parts of the park treat stormwater in a traditional manner and do not integrate stormwater management with the overall aesthetic, experience, and activities of the park. The only means of accessing the park is by car.

### What Residents Said They Want in the Park:

- Sad that the bike track is gone
- Add shade by playground – gets too hot



## Hope Park

**Park Classification: Neighborhood Park**  
**Overall Average Park Score: 2.4 out of 5.0**

### *Proximity, Access, and Linkages (2.0)*

Hope Park is located in the center of a residential neighborhood in southwestern North Port. Only one side of the park has views from an adjacent public right-of-way, thereby limiting visibility into the park. While the streets around the park have good sidewalk connectivity, none of the sidewalks connect directly to the park, and there are no shade trees. Signage is limited to identification and regulatory signage.

### *Comfort and Image (3.0)*

Like many of the City's neighborhood parks, most of the facilities in Hope Park are aging and tired. The park does not provide the best overall first impression, but seating is sufficient and there is shelter in the case of inclement weather. Limited natural surveillance into the park can make for somewhat of an unsafe feeling, especially when the park is not busy.

### *Uses, Activities and Sociability (2.2)*

The park provides users with traditional neighborhood park recreation facilities including a playground, shelter, picnic areas, and multi-purpose open space. These facilities; however, may not address the needs of the surrounding neighborhood as the park does not appear to be well-used. At the time of the site evaluation, there was evidence of minor inappropriate uses of park facilities, specifically overturned trash cans and seats and minor vandalism to seating areas.

### *Sustainability: Environmental Sustainability (2.5)*

Most of the park is comprised of impervious surface and drains naturally or into a series of dry retention swales. Other parts of the park treat stormwater in a traditional manner and do not integrate stormwater management with the overall aesthetic, experience, and activities of the park. Multi-modal access to the park is limited due to lack of direct sidewalk connections, and light fixtures do not appear to be energy-efficient.

### What Residents Said They Want in the Park:

- No comments received from residents







#### What Residents Said They Want in the Park:

- Add horseshoe or bocce ball courts in space east of the pavilion
- Add restrooms
- Less ball parks and more wild areas

## La Brea Park

### Park Classification: Neighborhood Park

Overall Average Park Score: 2.6 out of 5.0

#### *Proximity, Access, and Linkages (2.8)*

La Brea Park is one of the few parks in the City where residential homes face the park and provide “eyes on the park.” As a result, the park has great visibility from the surrounding area and is one of the few neighborhood parks with vehicular parking along one of the sides of the park. While the streets around the park have good sidewalk connectivity, none of the sidewalks connect directly to the park and there are few shade trees. Signage is limited to identification signage and regulatory signage.

#### *Comfort and Image (2.8)*

It appears that the park has benefited from recent investments, including an improved shelter and basketball courts. However, while it is evident that the park is regularly maintained, the park grounds do not provide the best overall first impression. There are limited seating options, but shelter is available in the case of inclement weather.

#### *Uses, Activities and Sociability (2.2)*

La Brea Park provides users with traditional neighborhood park recreation facilities including a playground, shelter, basketball court, picnic areas, and baseball field. These facilities; however, may not address the needs of the surrounding neighborhood as it appears that the park is under-used compared to other City of North Port facilities.

#### *Sustainability: Environmental Sustainability (2.5)*

Most of the park is comprised of pervious surface and drains naturally or into dry retention swales located along the edges of the park. These dry retention swales also serve to address the stormwater runoff from the street. Other parts of the park treat stormwater in a traditional manner and do not integrate stormwater management with the overall aesthetic, experience, and activities of the park. Access to the park is easiest by car, as there is no direct link from the surrounding sidewalk system to the park.





#### What Residents Said They Want in the Park:

- Add restrooms (2 votes)
- Re-pave parking lot
- Add parking for boat trailers
- Add fishing docks

## Marina Park

### Park Classification: Special Use

Overall Average Park Score: 2.5 out of 5.0

#### *Proximity, Access, and Linkages (2.8)*

Marina Park is one of two parks with boat ramps in the City of North Port. The park is located deep within a residential neighborhood, requiring boat traffic to reach the park through quiet neighborhood roads. However, its corner site lends itself to excellent visibility from the surrounding area. Sidewalk connectivity is mixed: although there is no direct sidewalk connection to the park, the sidewalk network to the northeast is good. There is no bus stop or transit route near the park, and signage is limited to identification and regulatory signage.

#### *Comfort and Image (3.0)*

While it is evident that the park is regularly maintained, the park grounds do not provide the best overall first impression. Boat parking occurs primarily in the grass, and frequent use has led to maintenance issues and damage. The asphalt parking surface also appears to be deteriorating. While there is a shelter available in the case of inclement weather, there are limited seating options in the park and no shade trees.

#### *Uses, Activities and Sociability (2.5)*

Park facilities are primarily water-based, and include boat ramps, boat dock, floating canoe/kayak dock, shelter with picnic tables, and parking. Most of the park, however, is used for boat parking which limits additional uses for the park.

#### *Sustainability: Environmental Sustainability (1.5)*

Most of the park is comprised of impervious surface and drains naturally into the ground, into the adjacent canal, or into dry retention swales located along the edges of the park. These dry retention swales address the stormwater runoff from the street. Other parts of the park treat stormwater in a traditional manner and do not integrate stormwater management with the overall aesthetic, experience, and activities of the park. Multi-modal access to the park favors vehicular access with constrained pedestrian and bicycle access.





## Marius Park

**Park Classification: Neighborhood Park**  
**Overall Average Park Score: 1.6 out of 5.0**

### *Proximity, Access, and Linkages (1.8)*

Marius Park was the lowest scoring park in the park system. It is the smallest neighborhood park, and is located deep in a neighborhood at the end of a residential street. Despite its location, there are “eyes on the park” from homes that face the park, and visibility from the surrounding area is good. The neighborhood has a good network of sidewalks, but they lack shade trees and do not connect directly to the park. Signage is limited to identification and regulatory signage.

### *Comfort and Image (1.5)*

The park does not appear to receive the same level of maintenance and attention as other City parks. At the time of the site evaluation, the grass was overgrown and trees were not limbed or trimmed. In addition to maintenance issues, there is no shelter and few seating options.

### *Uses, Activities and Sociability (1.3)*

Marius Park is primarily a passive park, and has no facilities or amenities other than picnic tables and public art. The park does not appear to be used frequently.

### *Sustainability: Environmental Sustainability (1.8)*

Most of the park is comprised of impervious surface and drains naturally into the ground or into dry retention swales located along the edges of the park. These dry retention swales address the stormwater runoff from the street. Other parts of the park treat stormwater in a traditional manner and do not integrate stormwater management with the overall aesthetic, experience, and activities of the park. Multi-modal access is limited to pedestrian access.

### What Residents Said They Want in the Park:

- Butterfly garden
- Make more inviting for picnics/sitting and lounging



#### What Residents Said They Want in the Park:

- Add electricity
- Add a bike rack or some structure to lock kayak while using park facilities
- Add stationary fitness stations
- Add horseshoe pits
- Schedule pest control for the pavilion
- Add lights needed for tennis courts and racquetball courts

## McKibben Park

**Park Classification: Neighborhood Park**  
**Overall Average Park Score: 3.2 out 5.0**

### *Proximity, Access, and Linkages (2.8)*

McKibben Park is located on the edge of a residential neighborhood along a canal. It is bordered by the backs of residential homes on two sides, a canal on a third side, and residential road on the fourth.

While the residential homes backing onto the park limit visibility from those sides, most of the park has great visibility from the residential road. McKibben Drive, which is the road that leads to the park, is an attractive residential street that contains sidewalks on both sides of the road with beautiful shade trees. Unfortunately, there is no direct sidewalk connection to the park, and signage is limited to identification signage and regulatory signage.

### *Comfort and Image (3.7)*

The park provides a great first overall impression, appears to be very well maintained and has received recent capital improvements. There is a shelter in the case of inclement weather, and multiple options for seating.

### *Uses, Activities and Sociability (3.7)*

McKibben Park offers a variety of activities for residents of all ages. Facilities include a playground, shuffleboard courts, shelter, basketball courts, tennis/pickleball courts, racquetball courts, multi-purpose open space, a restroom, picnic areas, and a canoe/kayak dock. The park is sufficient in size to allow for a variety of activities to happen at the same time without an impact to the quality and experience of these activities.

### *Sustainability: Environmental Sustainability (2.5)*

The park is comprised mostly of pervious surfaces with impervious surfaces being limited to sports courts facilities and a parking lot. Stormwater infiltrates naturally into the ground or drains into the adjacent canal; other parts of the park treat stormwater in a traditional manner and do not integrate stormwater management with the overall aesthetic, experience, and activities of the park. Light fixtures do not appear to be energy efficient. The park has good multi-modal access including vehicular, pedestrian, bicycle, and waterway access.







#### What Residents Said They Want in the Park:

- Less ball parks, devote land to wildlife
- Large pavilion for events in case of rain

## Narramore Sports Complex

**Park Classification: Recreational/Sports Facility**  
**Overall Average Park Score: 2.6 out 5.0**

### *Proximity, Access, and Linkages (2.3)*

Narramore Sports Complex is located on the edge of a few neighborhoods in the eastern part of the city. The park is bordered by the back of residential homes on two sides, Glenallen Elementary School on another side, and a roadway on the fourth side. While the residential homes and elementary school backing onto the park somewhat limit visibility, most of the park has good visibility from the roadway frontage. Additionally, the roads leading up to the park have a good sidewalk network, albeit without shade trees, and provide direct connectivity to the park. There is no transit access to the park, and signage is limited to identification and regulatory signage.

### *Comfort and Image (2.5)*

The park provides an acceptable overall impression and appears to be regularly maintained. While the athletic fields are maintained by the County, the grounds surrounding the fields appear to not receive the same level of attention. The age and frequent use of the park's facilities have led to some deterioration and maintenance challenges. For example, the concession building and the rectangular fields are accessed by an undefined dirt path, which detracts from the aesthetic of the park. The overflow parking area near the rectangular fields is an unimproved area which also detracts from the overall aesthetic of the park. Additionally, seating areas are limited and there are very few shade trees in the park. Protection from inclement weather is limited to concession buildings, which are only open during programmed events and a sun shade structure.

### *Uses, Activities and Sociability (2.5)*

Narramore Sports Complex is highly focused on athletic uses and has multiple rectangular multi-purpose fields, softball fields, and batting cages. Because of this emphasis on sports, the park is largely inactive when there are no programmed events, and there is limited flexibility in accommodating other uses. While parking appears to be a challenge during programmed events, the rest of the park appears to have sufficient space to support programmed events.

### *Sustainability: Environmental Sustainability (3.0)*

Stormwater is treated in a traditional manner and does not integrate into the overall aesthetic, experience, and activities of the park. Access to the park is easiest by car, but there is some limited pedestrian and bicycle access. Light fixtures do not appear to have been updated for energy efficiency.



## Pine Park

**Park Classification: Neighborhood Park**  
**Overall Average Park Score: 3.0 out of 5.0**

### *Proximity, Access, and Linkages (3.0)*

Pine Park is one of the parks in the City where residential homes face the park and provide “eyes on the park.” This results in excellent visibility from the surrounding area. The park is also one of the few neighborhood parks with parking along one of the sides. While the streets around the park have good sidewalk connectivity, none of the sidewalks connect directly to the park. There are also no shade trees along the sidewalks, and very few in the park itself. Signage is limited to identification and regulatory signage.

### *Comfort and Image (3.5)*

While it is evident that the park is regularly maintained, the park grounds do not provide the best overall first impression. The park does however have a stand of palm and oaks trees that provide natural shade and add to the aesthetic of the park. Pine Park also appears to have received recent capital improvements. There is shelter available in case of poor weather, but seating options are limited.

### *Uses, Activities and Sociability (3.0)*

The park provides users with traditional neighborhood park recreation facilities including a playground, shelter, volleyball court, picnic areas, and multi-purpose open space. These facilities may not address the needs of the surrounding neighborhood as it appears that the park is under-used.

### *Sustainability: Environmental Sustainability (2.5)*

Most of Pine Park is comprised of impervious surface and drains naturally or into dry retention swales located along the edges of the park. These dry retention swales also address the stormwater runoff from the street. Other parts of the park treat stormwater in a traditional manner and do not integrate stormwater management with the overall aesthetic, experience, and activities of the park. The park is accessible by car and by walking.

### What Residents Said They Want in the Park:

- BBQ grills and tables
- Speed limits within the neighborhood
- More trees for shade







#### What Residents Said They Want in the Park:

- Keep skate park open on weekends and holidays
- Add Pickleball Courts
- Do not allow alcohol
- Get rid of the skate park and replace it with an amphitheater
- Make the bike area larger
- Workers should watch park and not just sit inside
- Designate bike hours vs. skate hours

## Skate Park

### Park Classification: Special Use

Overall Average Park Score: 2.8 and 5.0

#### *Proximity, Access, and Linkages (3.5)*

North Port Skate Park is located across from Dallas White Park. There is good visibility into the park from the street, and there is also good pedestrian connectivity to the surrounding neighborhood. The park is located along a transit route with a transit stop nearby. Signage is limited to identification and regulatory signage.

#### *Comfort and Image (2.2)*

The park has a poor first impression because of the aging amenities and the multiple layers of fencing. Although the park is regularly maintained, its facilities are tired, and some of the facilities such as the small concession building, shelters, grills, and seating areas appear to be approaching the end of their life cycles.

#### *Uses, Activities and Sociability (2.7)*

As a special use park, the skate park focuses on providing facilities for skateboarding and BMX biking. Grills, seating areas, and vending augment the skate park experience. Like many skate parks, the facility has a group of users that regularly uses the park, and the facilities and the grounds appear to be sufficient for programmed events. There may be opportunities for expansion around the park, or to add new amenities and increase the park's activity.

#### *Sustainability: Environmental Sustainability (2.8)*

Stormwater at the skate park is treated in a traditional manner and is not integrated with the overall aesthetic, experience, and activities of the park. The park is one of the only recreation sites in North Port that favors pedestrian and bicycle access over driving, as there is no parking lot. Light fixtures and systems in the concession building do not appear to be energy efficient.





## Sumter Boulevard Linear Park

**Park Classification: Recreational/Sports Facility**  
**Overall Average Park Score: 4.0 out of 5.0**

### *Proximity, Access, and Linkages (4.5)*

Sumter Boulevard is a north-south arterial roadway that serves as one of the main gateways into the City of North Port, and contains a linear park with a multi-purpose path. Sidewalk connectivity to the multi-purpose path is good from newer development along the roadway, but older neighborhoods largely lack direct sidewalk connections to the linear park. There is excellent visibility into the park from the surrounding roadway, and the park is located along a transit route with multiple transit stops providing access. Signage along the corridor includes branded identification, regulatory, environmental education, and locational signage, and is standard that other City parks should aspire to meet.

### *Comfort and Image (4.2)*

The linear park is well maintained and offers a great first impression. Along the multi-use path is a variety of seating areas and shelters in case inclement weather occurs.

### *Uses, Activities and Sociability (3.2)*

Uses and activities at the linear park include walking, biking, and jogging. This experience is augmented by sheltered seating areas and environmental education installations. Because of the park's linear shape, its ability to support other types of activities and programs is limited.

### *Sustainability: Environmental Sustainability (4.0)*

Sumter Boulevard is one of the few parks in the City which integrates stormwater management into the overall aesthetic, experience, and activity of the park. This includes not only stormwater from the park, but also that generated by the roadway—in certain areas, the stormwater management areas are highlighted. Access to the park favors pedestrian and bicycle access, but there are limited trailhead locations with parking. Light fixtures and electrical systems appear to be energy efficient.

#### What Residents Said They Want in the Park:

- Street lights/path lights
- Parking for the trail





#### What Residents Said They Want in the Park:

- Community Garden
- Leave natural

## Veterans Park

**Park Classification: Neighborhood Park**  
**Overall Average Park Score: 3.0 out 5.0**

### *Proximity, Access, and Linkages (3.5)*

Veterans Park is located on the edge of a residential neighborhood, next to the North Port Public Library. The park has a sidewalk along its perimeter, and a direct sidewalk connection to the neighborhood east of the park. There are no direct sidewalk connections to the neighborhood on the south and west of the park. Visibility into the park from the surrounding area is excellent, and signage types include identification, regulatory, and educational.

### *Comfort and Image (3.3)*

The park is well maintained and offers a very positive first impression. There is a variety of shaded seating areas, but no shelter from inclement weather.

### *Uses, Activities and Sociability (2.5)*

The park is primarily passive in use, and is mostly used in conjunction with the Veteran's Memorial and related events. Central to the park is a retention pond that is well maintained and nicely landscaped. The park appears to provide sufficient space and amenities for programmed events. Its location next to the library also helps keep the park active with users.

### *Sustainability: Environmental Sustainability (2.8)*

The park is integrated well with stormwater management functions, which treat stormwater from the library and surrounding roadway. Multi-modal access to the park is predominantly pedestrian access with vehicular parking available in the library. Light fixtures and electrical systems appear to be energy efficient.





## Warm Mineral Springs Park

**Park Classification: Special Use**

**Overall Average Park Score: 2.0 out of 5.0**

### *Proximity, Access, and Linkages (1.7)*

Recently acquired in 2014, Warm Mineral Springs Park is located on the western edge of the city. The park is currently operated and managed by a private concessionaire and in addition to the natural warm spring, includes a gift shop, changing rooms, and restrooms. Access to the spring is controlled and accessible only through the gift shop, which is set back from the roadway behind a large parking lot. While the building has good visibility from the road, the spring is not visible. Signage at the park is aging and tired, but does include identification, regulatory signage, and some interpretive elements. Connections to the surrounding area are limited, and there is no bus stop or transit route to the park.

### *Comfort and Image (2.5)*

Despite the unique character of the spring, the park is old and makes a very poor first impression from the roadway. The parking lot and buildings are aging and in need of capital improvements, and the cyclorama building has not been used for many years and is deteriorating. While the areas around the actual spring are regularly maintained by the concessionaire, the age of the buildings and exterior areas of the spring deter from the overall aesthetic of the facility, which is very nice once visitors arrive at the springs themselves. The spaces around the spring provide a variety of seating options under shelter, natural shade, or in the sun.

### *Uses, Activities and Sociability (2.7)*

The primary activity at Warm Mineral Springs is swimming. This activity is enhanced by a variety of

seating options under shelters, shade, or in sunny areas and opportunities to purchase food and beverages. The park appears to provide sufficient space and amenities for its intended use.

### *Sustainability: Environmental Sustainability (1.5)*

Most of the spaces surrounding the spring are impervious and allow for natural filtration of stormwater, but the building and parking lot treat stormwater in a traditional manner and do not integrate stormwater management with the overall aesthetic, experience, and activities of the park. Light fixtures and electrical system do not appear to be energy efficient. The park heavily favors vehicle access, and pedestrian and bicycle connectivity are constrained.

### *Buildings: Buildings and Architecture (1.7)*

The buildings provide a poor first impression and deter from the aesthetic of the park—they are aging and tired and in need of capital improvements. Much of the building's finishes, furniture, equipment, and systems are also aging and near the end of their life cycle and in need of capital improvements.

However, clarity of entry and connection to the park is intuitive and the interior layout of the building provides an interesting experience and sense of arrival to the spring.

### What Residents Said They Want in the Park:

- Develop a “habitat garden” or certified wildlife area with trails throughout the property adorned with benches and informational signs on local flora and fauna
- Preserve the facilities on the property: the cyclorama is one of 4 in the country
- Add sidewalks and walkways that can lead people away from the road to the springs
- Lower prices for residents – don’t make that much money
- Add pavilion for weddings
- Add historical exhibits
- Provide opportunity to kayak
- Add wildlife habitat educational trails
- Add an amphitheater
- Provide a free day for North Port residents





## Future Park Needs or Findings

In addition to providing comments regarding what improvements residents would like to see implemented in existing parks, participants from the two public workshops and the Meeting-In-A-Box discussed further in Section 2.4, were given the opportunity to provide input regarding future parks.

Following is input obtained from participants related to what recreation facilities and amenities they would like to see developed in City of North Port undeveloped parkland and what facilities and amenities they would like to see implemented from various proposed conceptual park master plans.

### Boca Chica Park



#### What Residents Said They Want in the Park:

- Add Dog Park (2 votes)
- Add a playground
- Add picnic benches under shack
- Add grills
- Please leave undeveloped for natural wildlife
- Add a Community Garden

### Myakkahatchee Creek Environmental Park



#### What Residents Said They Want in the Park:

- Walking/running fitness trails (3 votes)
- Make pet friendly
- Upgrade the restroom
- Picnic Areas
- Improve trail markers
- Additional bridges for wet periods
- Put entrance on Sumpter Blvd
- Dog playing area
- Bridge connection to Carlton Preserve
- Better trails, environmental center and native plants
- Equestrian Trails



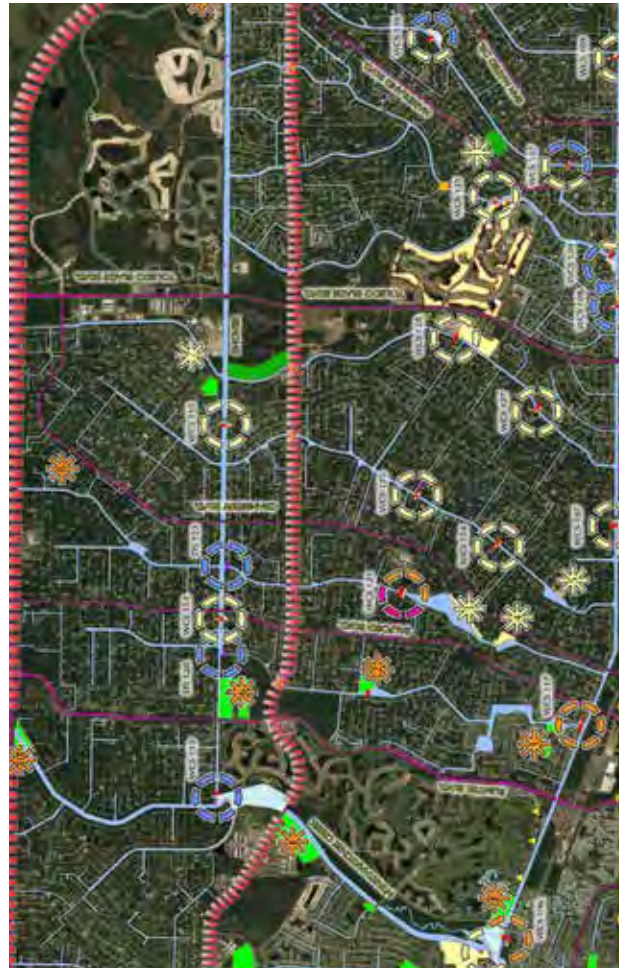
## Oaks Park



### What Residents Said They Want in the Park:

- Bike/walking trails
- Great wild area
- Needs Horse trails
- Improve the bridges across the creek, better signage, better parking lot, trail markers and maps of the park
- Add BMX Track
- Add all terrain trails
- Add dog walking trails
- Create better parking lot
- Create better restrooms

## Proposed Canal and Creek System Master Plan (2010)



### What Residents Said They Want in the Park:

- Provide opportunities to rent boats, paddleboats or Kayaks
- Benches near the water to enjoy scenery
- Consideration for active seniors
- Dredge canal so kayaking from Blue Ridge Park to Environmental Park is plausible

## Proposed Myahkkahatchee Creek Greenway Master Plan (2007)



### What Residents Said They Want in the Park:

- Provide opportunities for bird watching
- Implement board walk
- Keep horse trails along I75
- Bridge connection to Carlton
- Dog trail
- Protect horse trail access to properties



## Proposed West Villages 63 Acre Park (2008)

### What Residents Said They Want in the Park:

- This park would be for everyone!
- Design park with the wildlife in mind. Kids love wild areas
- No smoking facility



Since the site evaluations were completed in the summer of 2015, several enhancements and amenities have been added to the parks as part of the City's placemaking initiatives. In addition, 16 City parks have been designated as dog-friendly.



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## 2.2 Recreation Programs, Facilities and Services Assessment

As discussed in Section 1.2, the City of North Port Parks and Recreation Division provides a number of recreation programs:

- Special Interest
- Fitness/Exercise
- Sports/Leagues
- Services

In general, the Division has strong programming in special events, summer camps, youth programs, teen activities, environmental programs, and fitness. Areas of programming weaknesses include cultural arts, youth sports, aquatics, special needs, and seniors. The box below provides an assessment of the Division's recreation programs, facilities, and services based on the existing conditions discussed in Section 1.2.



### Recreation Programs, Facilities, and Services Assessment:

- Limited staff will impact the ability to grow programs and services in the future.
- Since most recreation programming is run out of the community centers, most services are only available in the core area of the community.
- The City does not currently make use of school facilities for recreation programs or services. It will be important that this occurs in the future to allow for the growth in programming.
- Parks and Recreation Division staff has an interest in expanding eco-tourism opportunities.
- The Parks and Recreation Division does not conduct any youth sports tournaments.
- The City of North Port would benefit greatly from the development of a long range program plan to guide the future development of recreation programs and services.

## 2.2.1 Recreation Facilities Assessment

The City of North Port Parks and Recreation Division operates a variety of indoor and outdoor recreation facilities. As discussed in Section 1.2.1 - 1.2.3, these include:

- Morgan Family Community Center
- George Mullen Activity Center
- Scout House
- Butler Park
- Atwater Park
- Larry Thoennissen Athletic Fields
- Narramore Sports Complex
- Dallas White Park
- North Port Skate Park
- City Center Front Green

Beyond these City facilities, there are number of other significant providers in North Port. These are:

- North Port Family YMCA
- North Port Senior Center
- North Port Art Center
- North Port Performing Arts Center
- Boys & Girls Club
- Sarasota County
- Private Health Clubs
- Warm Mineral Springs

Additionally, there are several dance, martial arts and gymnastics studios in the area. Also a number of churches are available for recreation purposes. The Sarasota County School District has a variety of indoor facilities and outdoor sports fields but the City is not currently a strong user of these facilities.

The box below provides an assessment of the Division's recreation facilities based on the existing conditions discussed in Section 1.2.1 - 1.2.3.

### Recreation Facility Assessment:

- The two community center buildings are in close proximity to each other, while significant sections of the community (north and east), lack this facility altogether. Community centers are the primary location for the delivery of parks and recreation services, thus it is difficult to deliver services in those areas that lack centers.
- Since the City does not have a true public pool, there is a great deal of pressure to build a new aquatic center. An aquatics master plan study was completed in 2010 and plans are in place for a family aquatic center at Butler Park. There are estimated to be 7,466 pools in the City, 19 of which are part of an HOA or an apartment complex. For neighborhood aquatic needs the plan recommended building small splashpads.
- A significant number of organizations use City of North Parks and Recreation facilities for their operation but the City is still responsible for their overall maintenance.
- The long-term future of Warm Mineral Springs Park will be determined through a Master Plan process. The number of athletic fields appears to be inadequate for the demand for youth and adult sports. It is estimated two to three diamond fields are needed.
- The City does not have a large field complex (rectangular or diamond fields) that can support tournaments. The Narramore Sports Complex is the largest field complex but does not have more than three fields for rectangular or diamond sports.
- There is a desire to have more sports fields in a single location rather than spread throughout the community.
- There is a need to have stronger use of school facilities.
- Establishing formal operational guidelines would help to assure that these facilities are being utilized to their full capability.
- The Morgan Family Community Center and George Mullen Activity Center have Wi-Fi.





## 2.3 Division Operations and Maintenance Practices Assessment

### 2.3.1 Staffing and Organization Assessment

As discussed in Section 1.3.1, the Parks and Recreation Division is located within the General Services Department of the City and is responsible for providing recreation programs and services as well as managing the two community centers. In addition, there is Property Maintenance, which is responsible for parks grounds maintenance as well as overall facilities maintenance.

When compared to national benchmark data, it appears that the Division's number of staff is low given the amount of acres that the Division maintains and manages. Figure 2.3a benchmarks the Division's number of acres managed per Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) positions to National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) PRORAGIS national benchmark data. This comparison suggests that the Division appears to maintain slightly more acreage per FTE than the national median and substantially more acreage per FTE than the lower quartile.

The box on page 83 provides an assessment of the Division's staffing and maintenance organization based on the analysis previously completed and the existing conditions discussed in Section 1.3.1.

**Figure 2.3a: 2014 City of North Port Parks and Recreation Division Budget Benchmark to National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) PRORAGIS National City Benchmark Budget Data**

	City of North Port*	National Benchmarks <sup>1</sup>		
		Lower Quartile	Median	Upper Quartile
Acres of land maintained and managed*	581	-	-	-
Full Time Equivalent (FTE) positions	33.5	-	-	-
Acres of land maintained and managed per FTE**	17.34	5.4	12.8	24.1

\*Source: City of North Port Parks and Recreation Division, 2015

<sup>1</sup>Source: National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) PRORAGIS Field Report, 2015

\*\*Through an Interlocal Agreement, Sarasota County manages and maintains 243 acres of City of North Port Parks.

### Staffing and Maintenance Organization Assessment:

- For the Parks and Recreation Division the level of full-time staffing appears to be low. Plans to continue to transition part time position to full time will help alleviate this problem and also facilitate administrative level oversight at each activity center. In 2016, a new recreation supervisor position was approved and hired. Property Maintenance has had a significant reduction in staff over the last three to five years.
- While Property Maintenance has had a significant reduction in staff over the past three to five years, one Building Tech III was added starting 1-1-2018.
- Most staff positions in Parks and Recreation are full-time and all positions in Property Maintenance are full-time. This is due in part to the difficulty in hiring part-time staff (time and procedure) as well as the assignment of part-time hours to individual positions rather than a pool of hours and money. Parks & Recreation should continue plans to transition part time positions to full time.
- The Recreation Program Coordinator positions are full-time hourly employees, and salaries for those positions were recently adjusted based on the City's Comprehensive Salary Evaluation.
- For Parks and Recreation there is a mixture of facility and program responsibilities for most staff. Most programs are delivered on the individual facility level rather than on a division wide basis.
- In addition to providing services and managing facilities, a number of Parks and Recreation full-time staff also teach recreation classes.
- Property Maintenance supports over 190 City-wide special events (held by both internal and external organizations) but it is becoming increasingly difficult to support all of these efforts with regular staff hours.
- Every full-time staff member has an annual performance evaluation completed at 90 days and then annually. These evaluations indicate areas of excellence, areas of compliance areas where improvements should be made, and measureable benchmarks.
- A strong staff training and education program to provide opportunities for staff growth and improvement is being implemented. This staff training program focuses on financial transactions, customer service, program development, budgeting, revenue growth and facility operations and maintenance.
- The team should continue to foster a strong communications plan between Parks and Recreation and Property Maintenance.



### 2.3.2 Operations Policies and Procedures Assessment

The Parks and Recreation Division has basic operational policies and procedures in place that are reviewed and updated annually or as needed. This includes an operations manual that articulates policies dealing with employee expectations, fee structures, program registrations, rentals, refunds and emergency procedures. The box to the right provides an assessment of the Division's operations policies and procedures based on the existing conditions discussed in Section 1.3.2

#### Operations Policies and Procedures Assessment:

- While there are basic operating policies and procedures on a Parks and Recreation Division level these need to be used as a foundation to establish the same for each individual facility, program area, and maintenance.
- There does not appear to be an operations manual and specific policies and procedures for the Property Maintenance division.
- The emergency action plan is in the process of being expanded to include situations such as active shooter, lock downs, natural disasters and other emergency situations beyond just fire and medical. The general policies and procedures could then be reinforced by specifics for each facility and major program and maintenance areas.

### 2.3.3 Maintenance Plans and Procedures Assessment

As discussed in Section 1.3.3, maintenance of parks, recreation facilities, and City facilities are divided amongst various entities. The City's parks, recreation facilities, and all City facilities are the responsibility of Property Maintenance. Besides Property Maintenance, there is also a significant parks janitorial contract as well as a facilities janitorial contract that handles day-to-day cleaning responsibilities. Contracting of additional maintenance and janitorial services is anticipated in the future. Athletic field maintenance is the responsibility of Sarasota County but the City is responsible for any capital improvements above \$5,000.

The box below provides an assessment of the Division's maintenance plans and procedures based on the existing conditions discussed in Section 1.3.3

#### Maintenance Plans and Procedures Assessment:

- Property Maintenance would benefit greatly from having a comprehensive maintenance management plan and a specific preventative maintenance plan in place to guide maintenance work.
- There are up to five different entities providing maintenance, making coordination more difficult: Property Maintenance, private contractors, the Parks and Recreation Division, Public Works, and Sarasota County.
- Union rules impact Property Management staffing plans and functions.
- Staff is being reduced while contract services are being increased. There is a concern that too many functions may be contracted.
- The lower level of full-time staff is making it difficult to support all of the special events that occur in the community.



### 2.3.4 Operating Budget Assessment

The Parks and Recreation Division provides a variety of services with a staff and budget that appear to be below regional and national department budget benchmarks. There are three main metrics used to gauge whether a city is adequately funded to manage, operate, maintain, and build its parks and recreation system. These are operating budget per resident, capital budget per resident, and total budget per resident (the sum of the operating and capital budgets). These metrics are determined by dividing the total dollars of each type of budget by the population of the city.

Benchmarking the Division against NRPA PRORAGIS 2014 national city budget data suggest that the Division may have limited budget resources. The Division's budget was benchmarked to national operating budget per resident and operating budget per acre benchmarks. Figure 2.3b benchmarks the Division's operating budget per resident to national city benchmark budget data. The Division's operating budget per residents is just below the national median and well below the national upper quartile.

Figure 2.3c benchmarks the Division's operating budget per acre to national city benchmark budget data. The Division's operating budget per acre is also just below the national median and well below the upper quartile.

Cost recovery budget data was also analyzed. The cost recovery rate for the City of North Port's Parks and Recreation Division has varied between 30.1 percent and 32.6 percent, which is

relatively low considering that maintenance costs are not included. It is not unusual to see the percentage of cost recovery for just recreation above 50 percent and as high as 100 percent. The cost recovery rate for Parks and Recreation and Property Maintenance together varies between 8.9 percent and 9.8 percent, which is very low compared to the national average of nearly 30 percent.



**Figure 2.3b: 2014 City of North Port Parks and Recreation Division Budget Benchmark to National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) PRORAGIS National City Benchmark Budget Data**

	City of North Port <sup>1</sup>	National Benchmarks <sup>2</sup>		
		Lower Quartile	Median	Upper Quartile
Population*	60,380	-	-	-
Department Operating Budget	\$3,479,223	-	-	-
Operating Budget Per Resident	\$57.62	\$31.82	\$63.50	\$111.68

\*Source: U.S. Census, 2014

<sup>1</sup>Source: City of North Port Parks and Recreation Division, 2015

<sup>2</sup>Source: National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) PRORAGIS Field Report, 2015

**Figure 2.3c: 2014 City of North Port Parks and Recreation Division Budget Benchmark to National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) PRORAGIS National City Benchmark Budget Data**

	City of North Port <sup>1</sup>	National Benchmarks <sup>2</sup>		
		Lower Quartile	Median	Upper Quartile
Acres Managed and Maintained	581*	-	-	-
Department Operating Budget	\$3,479,223	-	-	-
Operating Budget Per Acre	\$5,922.34	\$4,163	\$8,884	\$17,597

\*Source: U.S. Census, 2014

<sup>1</sup>Source: City of North Port Parks and Recreation Division, 2015

<sup>2</sup>Source: National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) PRORAGIS Field Report, 2015

\*Through an Interlocal Agreement, Sarasota County manages and maintains 243 acres of City of North Port Parks.

The box below provides an assessment of the Division's operating budget based on the previous analysis and the existing conditions discussed in Section 1.3.4.

#### Operating Budget Assessment:

- The Division's operating, capital, and total budget appears to be low in comparison to national benchmarks.
- Parks and Recreation is all in one budget, making it difficult to break out costs and revenues for individual facilities or major program areas.
- Property Maintenance also has all of its expenses in one single budget making it more difficult to separate parks and recreation expenses from other areas.
- Overall budgets continue to increase but there has been a reduction in staff numbers for Property Maintenance as more functions are contracted to outside vendors.
- Cost recovery rates are low compared to industry averages.



### 2.3.5 Fee Philosophy and Policies

Currently the Parks and Recreation Division has a basic schedule of fees that are part of a City ordinance, which is approved on an annual basis. As discussed in Section 1.3.5, the basic philosophy is that fees are set in large part on a desire to generate strong revenues from recreation programs, facility rentals, and other uses. Recreation programs and services are designated to cover their direct costs.

Most of the fees for programs appear to be close to the market averages, as are the rental fees. However, fees for the use of the gazebos and pavilions appear to be low, as do the fees for special event permits and other event related charges.

The box below provides an assessment of the Division's fee philosophy and policies based on the existing conditions discussed in Section 1.3.5.

#### Fee Policy Challenges:

- The Parks and Recreation Division would benefit from the establishment of a formal fee philosophy that would outline the approach to setting fees for all programs and uses.
- Completing annual fee comparisons with other providers will be important to establish market values for services.
- Matching the fee philosophy and policies to social equity issues will need to be considered.







## 2.4 City Commissioner and Manager Interviews

An essential component of the parks and recreation planning process is gathering input from elected officials. Interviews were conducted with all five City Commissioners, the Assistant City Manager, and the City Manager. Questions were asked about needs and priorities, funding alternatives, and comparable communities for benchmarking.

### Top Priorities

At the time the needs and priorities assessment was conducted in 2015, Commissioners and administrators agreed that the top parks and recreation priorities in North Port were:

- Connectivity, completion of the trails and greenways system, and related nature-based tourism; and
- Multi-purpose/ athletic fields

Other needs include a water park/ aquatics center, wildlife habitat, tennis courts, family programs, cultural events, renovation of Warm Mineral Springs, and improvements to existing parks and facilities.

During the 2017 Strategic Planning Process, Commissioners identified the following priorities related to Parks & Recreation:

- North Port Aquatic Center
- Warm Mineral Springs Master Plan
- Trail Development-Heron Creek
- Youth Sports Agreement
- Deer Prairie Creek Connector Bridge
- Sidewalk Master Plan and Policy: Review/Refinement
- West Villages 63 Acre Park and Atlanta Braves Stadium

### Funding

Commissioners and administrators are generally in support of current funding mechanisms including the general fund (ad valorem taxes), grants, and impact fees. Other funding sources to consider include county surtax, bonds, special assessments, user fees, donations, and public-private partnerships.

## 2.5 Focus Group Meetings

In addition to interviewing elected officials, the planning team conducted ten focus group meetings on June 17 and 18, 2015. Local leaders and community members representing the following themes were invited:

1. Recreation and Culture
2. Faith-based Groups
3. Schools and Local Government
4. Community Agencies
5. Services Groups and Clubs
6. Economic Development and Local Business
7. City of North Port Staff
8. Sports and Athletics
9. Environmental and Preservation
10. Eco-tourism

Focus group participants were asked about parks and recreation needs and priorities. High priority needs identified from the focus group discussions included:

- Trails and greenways, nature and culture-based tourism
- Better access and connectivity, including bike paths, trails, and transit
- More things to do for all ages, closer to home
- Central indoor/ outdoor gathering spaces, activity hubs, town center
- Better awareness, communication, social media
- Multi-purpose athletic fields

Other needs mentioned in the focus group meetings included an indoor/outdoor pool; better coordination with local government agencies to use existing parks and recreation facilities; nature-based recreation programs; better use of canals and waterways for recreation and education; and tree plantings.

## 2.6 Community Meetings

Community Workshops were held on Wednesday, June 17, 2015 at the Morgan Family Community Center and on Thursday, June 18, 2015 at the George Mullen Activity Center to solicit input from residents. A combined total of over 63 people attended the meetings. Attendees participated in five different exercises to provide input.

### **Exercise 1: Facilities and Program Priorities**

A variety of programs and facilities were placed on two large boards. Attendees were asked to place four dots on the programs and facilities they believe are most important to their household.

Participants indicated that the most important facilities include:

- Outdoor swimming pools/water park (18 percent of responses)
- Off-leash dog park (17 percent)
- Walking, hiking, and biking trails (12 percent)

Participants indicated that the most important programs include:

- Special events (13 percent)
- Water fitness programs (11 percent)
- Nature programs (9 percent)
- Other programs (9 percent)

### **Exercise 2: Individual Park Improvements**

Images of the City's existing parks and proposed park master plans were displayed throughout the room. Attendees were asked to provide their input related to the improvements that they would like to see made in each of the parks. City-wide, meeting attendees noted the following needs:

- Allow dogs on leash at city parks
- Bike paths along the canal systems where we do not need to be concerned about vehicle collisions and we can motivate ourselves at a decent speed for exercise.
- Look at purchasing up to 6 contiguous lots (undeveloped) in parts of the city without adequate parks -
  - 1) along Hillsborough Boulevard
  - 2) along Town Terrace.
- The city needs a golf course. If one comes up for sale it would be wise to purchase.

In response to the existing/proposed pedestrian connections and blueways base maps, stakeholders noted the following:

- Would like a foot/"walk" bridge from Tripoli St. to Mullen Center.
- Add workout equipment to parks
- Trail or bikeway connecting all roads
- Additional roadways for neighborhood exit
- Equestrian riding trails

Resident input on specific facilities can be found in the call-out boxes of Section 3.2, Site Evaluations.





### Exercise 3: Funding Priorities

Each participant was given \$100 in gold coins, and asked to distribute the coins between 6 buckets based on their parks and recreation spending priorities. Spending categories (buckets) included:

- Development of new aquatics center
- Acquisition and development of walking and biking trails
- Improvements/maintenance of existing parks, pools, and recreation facilities
- Development of new indoor facilities (indoor walking track, fitness center, gyms, etc.)
- Construction of new sports fields (softball, soccer, baseball, etc.)
- Other

Participants in the two workshops allocated their funds as follows:

Development of new aquatics center	\$28.94
Acquisition and development of walking and biking trails	\$23.06
Improvements/maintenance of existing parks, pools, and recreation facilities	\$22.03
Development of new indoor facilities (indoor walking track, fitness center, gyms, etc.)	\$11.91
Other	\$9.70
Construction of new sports fields (softball, soccer, baseball, etc.)	\$4.36
Total	\$100.0

### Exercise 4: Open Discussion

Participants were invited to speak with the City of North Port Parks and Recreation Manager to share parks and recreation needs, issues, or concerns. Participants' comments indicated a need for a wide variety of park improvements, programs, and/or facilities including:

- Connection to Legacy Trail
- Dog park for families
- Pool at dog park
- Parking lot paved at dog park
- Activities for kids on the Holidays
- Extended hours for the community center
- Clubs for the kids
- Outdoor pavilions
- Walking/biking path along with Canals
- Activities for the "middle of the road" people
- Field days
- Concrete chess tables
- Wildlife corridor
- RC track
- Speed limit signs or speed bumps by Pine and McKibben parks
- Separate hours for bike/skate use at skate park
- BMX track for racing
- Foot golf course ([www.footgolf.net](http://www.footgolf.net))
- Wi-Fi at Morgan Center is not fast enough



Figure 2.6a: Trail and Blueway Connection Priorities



### Exercise 5: Trail Connectivity

Participants were asked to identify what trail and blueway connections they believed were priorities. Figure 2.6a illustrates the connections identified.

Pedestrian crossing sign

Footbridge connecting George Mullen Activity Center to Tripoli Street

6'-10' wide sidewalks

Footbridge over Cocoplum Waterway to Publix at Cocoplum Plaza



### 2.6.1 Kids Workshop

Over 30 children ranging in age from 5 to 15 were asked to identify what programs and facilities were most important to their household. A variety of programs and facilities were placed on two large boards. The children were asked to place four dots on the programs and facilities they believed were most important to their household.

The children indicated that the top three most important facilities were:

- Youth baseball fields (18 percent of responses)
- Youth soccer fields (12 percent)
- Outdoor swimming pools/water park (11 percent)

The children indicated that the top three most important programs were:

- Youth gymnastics and cheerleading (20 percent)
- Youth sports programs (11 percent)
- Fishing programs (11 percent)

Additionally children were asked to draw their ideal park. While drawings ranged from parks with a variety of recreation facilities including athletic fields, dog parks, roller coasters, etc., a common amenity that was found in many of the drawings were hot tubs.





## 2.7 Meeting-In-a-Box

The City provided materials for residents and organizations to conduct their own meetings, including:

- Copies of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan Survey
- Facilities and Programs Priorities Exercise
- Individual Park Improvement Exercise

Approximately 31 residents participated in the Meeting in a Box exercises.

Highlights included:

- 100 percent of the respondents rated the overall physical condition of the City's facilities and amenities they visited as "excellent" or "good."
- 20 percent of respondents have participated in the City's parks and recreation programs.
- 60 percent of those who participated in programs do so because of the location of the facility; 40 percent have participated because of the quality of the facility, convenient times the programs are offered, and the facilities are accessible.
- 100 percent of the respondents rated the quality of the City's programs they participated in as "excellent" or "good."
- Trails are the most important recreation facilities to respondents' households, followed by neighborhood parks and outdoor swimming pools.
- Special events are the most important programs to respondents' households, followed by adult fitness and wellness programs, and adult drama/performance programs.
- Over 50 percent of the respondents would be most willing to fund a new outdoor family aquatic center with additional tax dollars, followed by Improvements/maintenance of existing parks, pools, and recreation facilities (38 percent) and acquisition and development of walking and biking trails (38 percent).
- 60 percent of respondents would be willing to pay \$25 or more per year in user fees for parks and recreation facilities or programs.





## 2.8 Statistically Valid Mail-in/Telephone/Online Survey

ETC Institute conducted a Statistically Valid Community Interest and Opinion Survey for the City of North Port during the summer of 2015 to help determine parks and recreation priorities for the community. The survey was mailed to a random sample of households in North Port, with an option to complete the survey in Spanish. Households that did not return the survey by mail received a follow-up phone call to complete the survey over the telephone if desired. A total of 514 households completed the survey; results have a 95 percent level of confidence with a precision rate of at least +/- 4.3 percent. There were no statistically significant differences in the results of the survey based on the method of administration. Major findings from the survey include:

### Household Use of Parks/Facilities and Ratings of Overall Condition

Two-thirds (67 percent) of respondents indicated that over the past year, they have used visited a park or facility owned by the City of North Port. Of those who had visited parks and facilities, 86 percent rated the overall physical condition as “excellent” or “good.”

### Types of Facilities/Amenities Operated by the City That Households Have Visited

Forty-nine (49) percent of households that visited a North Port facility over the past year indicated they had used walking trails. Other facilities and amenities commonly used include: playground equipment (46 percent), picnic shelters and areas (44 percent), natural areas (39 percent), dog parks (29 percent), and pavilions (27 percent).

### THREE Facilities/Amenities Households Used or Visited Most Often

Based on the sum of their top three choices, the facilities/amenities households used or visited most often by respondents was playground equipment (32 percent). Other facilities/amenities that were used or visited most often include: walking trails (30 percent), natural areas (23 percent), picnic shelters and areas (21 percent), and dog parks (19 percent).

### Households That Have Participated in Recreation Programs and Ratings of Overall Quality

Only sixteen percent (16 percent) of households indicated they had participated in recreation programs offered by North Port Parks and Recreation over the past 12 months. Of those, 36 percent participated in one program, 41 percent participated in 2 to 3 programs, 21 percent participated in 4 or more programs, and 2 percent did not know. Ninety-four percent (94 percent) of those who participated rated the overall quality of programs as either “excellent” or “good.”

### Reasons Households Use North Port Parks and Recreation Facilities and Services

Eighty-one percent (81 percent) of households indicated they use North Port Parks and Recreation facilities and services because it is close to their home. Other reasons for using North Port’s facilities and services include: enjoyment of the outdoors (61 percent), availability of restrooms (48 percent), availability of parking (43 percent), well-maintained facilities (43 percent), safety of parks and facilities (41 percent), and improved physical fitness and health (40 percent).

### Households That Have a Need for Parks and Recreation Facilities

Fifty-six percent (56 percent) of households indicated the need for walking, hiking and biking trails. Other facilities that households have a need for include: small neighborhood parks (51 percent), nature trails (50 percent), large community parks (47 percent), natural areas and wildlife habitats (45 percent), picnic areas and shelters (39 percent), and outdoor swimming pools/water parks (39 percent).

### FOUR Parks and Recreation Facilities That Are Most Important to Households

Based on the sum of their top four choices, the parks and recreation facilities that are most important to households include: walking, hiking and biking trails (32 percent), small neighborhood parks (22 percent), nature trails (21 percent), and outdoor swimming pools/water parks (21 percent).

### Households That Have a Need for Recreation Programs

Thirty-five percent (35 percent) of households indicated they have a need for adult fitness and wellness programs. Other recreation programs that households have a need for include: nature programs (32 percent), special events (25 percent), fishing programs (25 percent), water fitness programs (21 percent), senior adult programs (20 percent), and youth sports programs (20 percent).

### FOUR Recreation Programs That Are Most Important to Households

Based on the sum of their top four choices, the recreation programs that are most important to households include: adult fitness and wellness programs (23 percent), nature programs (15

percent), fishing programs (13 percent), and water fitness programs (13 percent).

**Recreation Programs in Which Households Participate Most Often**

Based on the sum of their top four choices, the recreation programs in which households participate most often include: youth sports programs (9 percent), special events (9 percent), adult fitness and wellness programs (8 percent), and nature programs (7 percent).

**Ways Respondents Learn about North Port Parks and Recreation Services**

Forty-one percent (41 percent) of households indicated they learn about North Port Parks and Recreation services from friends and neighbors. Other ways households learn about services include: newspaper (33 percent), City newsletter (30 percent), City of North Port website (29 percent), the Internet (27 percent), and social media (20 percent).

**Ways Respondents Would MOST LIKE to Receive Information**

Regarding Parks and Recreation Services: Based on the sum of their top three choices, the ways respondents would most like to receive information about parks and recreation services is by City newsletter. Other ways households would most like to receive information include: City of North Port website (26 percent), newspaper (25 percent), and the Internet (22 percent).

**North Port Special Events/Festivals and Satisfaction with Those Attended**

Forty-four (44) percent of households indicated they have attended a special event or festival sponsored by the City of North Port. Of those, 41 percent have attended the fireworks display. Other reasons for attending North Port special

events and festivals include: enjoyment of outdoor festivals (38 percent), live music (36 percent), free admission (35 percent), and children’s activities (31 percent). Eighty-one percent (81 percent) of those who attended and had an opinion were either “very satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied” with the events.

**Satisfaction With Overall Value Households Receive From North Port Parks and Recreation**

Fifty-three percent (53 percent) of households who had an opinion indicated they are either “very satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied” with the overall value they receive from North Port Parks and Recreation; 32 percent were “neutral,” 10 percent were “somewhat dissatisfied” and 5 percent were “very dissatisfied.”

**Level of Support for Actions to Improve Parks and Recreation Amenities and Facilities**

Seventy percent (70 percent) of households who had an opinion were either “very supportive” or “somewhat supportive” of North Port developing new walking and biking trails and connecting trails. Other actions for which households are “very supportive” or “somewhat supportive” include: upgrading existing neighborhood and community parks (68 percent), upgrading existing walking and biking trails (65 percent), developing new water based recreation areas (61 percent), and developing a new outdoor family aquatic center (60 percent).

**Actions That Households Would is Most Willing to Fund with Additional Tax Dollars**

Thirty-three percent (33 percent) of households indicated they would be willing to develop a new outdoor family aquatic center with their tax dollars. Other actions that households are willing to fund include: upgrading existing neighborhood and community parks (24 percent), developing new walking and biking trails and connecting trails (24

percent), and developing a park adjacent to Warm Mineral Springs (21 percent).

**How Respondents Would Allocate \$100 Among Various Categories of Funding:**

When asked how they would allocate \$100 among various categories of parks and recreation funding, they distributed the funds in the following way:

Development of new aquatic center	\$25.00
Improvements/maintenance of existing parks, pools, and recreation facilities	\$24.00
Acquisition and development of walking and biking trails	\$18.00
Development of new indoor facilities	\$14.00
Other Improvements	\$12.00
Construction of new sports fields (softball, soccer, baseball, etc.)	\$7.00
Total	\$100.0

**Amount of User Fees Households Would be Willing to Pay to Fund Parks, Trails, Recreation Amenities and Programs That Are Most Important:**

One-fourth (25 percent) of households who had an opinion would support paying annual user fees of \$76 or more to fund parks, trails, recreation amenities and programs that are most important. Other levels of annual funding support include: \$51 to \$75 (7 percent), \$26 to \$50 (19 percent), \$25 or less (22 percent), and nothing (27 percent).

## 2.8.1 Unmet Needs Matrices

The Importance-Unmet Needs Matrix is a tool for assessing the priority that should be placed on parks and recreation facilities in North Port, based on results from the statistically valid citizen survey. Responses to each of the parks and recreation facilities that were assessed on the survey were placed in one of the following four quadrants:

### Top Priorities

#### *Higher importance and higher unmet need*

Items in this quadrant should be given the highest priority for improvement. Respondents placed a high level of importance on these items, and the unmet need rating is high. Improvements to items in this quadrant will have positive benefits for the highest number of North Port residents having unmet needs in facilities that are of high importance.

### Continued Emphasis

#### *Higher importance and lower unmet need*

This quadrant shows where the City is doing an excellent job in providing facilities of higher importance resulting in unmet needs being lower. It is of great importance that continued emphasis be given to these facilities so that unmet needs do not increase.

### Lower Priorities

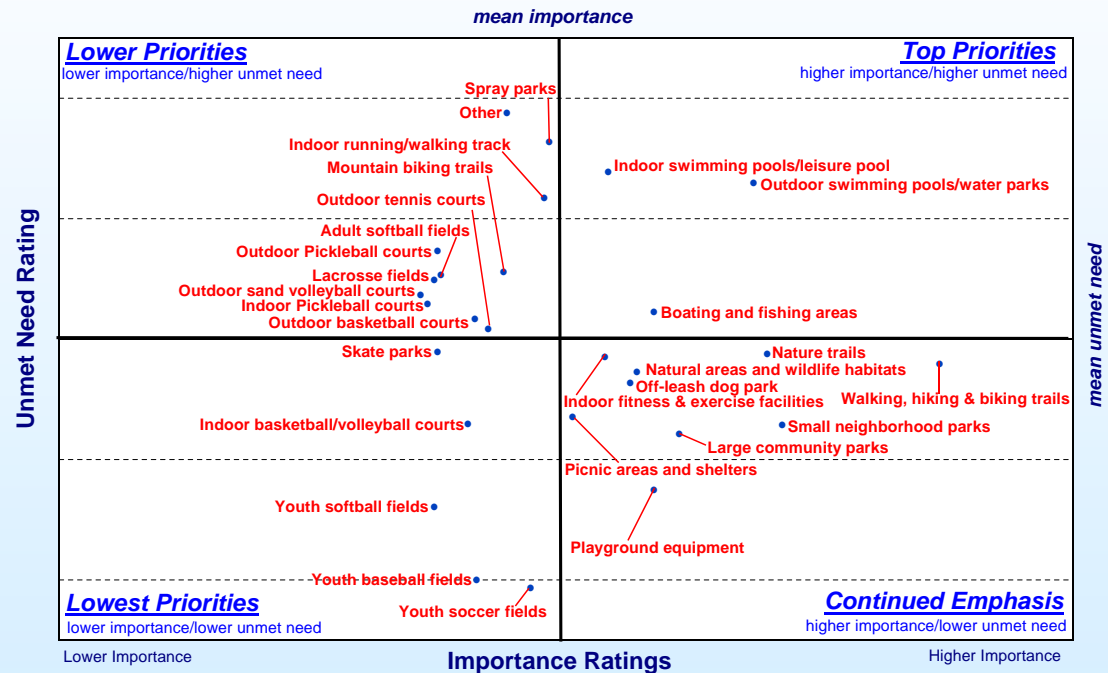
#### *Lower importance and higher unmet need*

Respondents placed a lower level of importance on these items, but the unmet need rating is relatively high. Items in this quadrant are often times indicative of facilities that are important to a smaller percentage of city respondents, with those respondents having a higher unmet need. A lower level of investment should occur in this quadrant than in either the Top Priorities or Continued Emphasis Quadrants.

Figure 2.8a: Importance-Unmet Needs Matrix for Parks and Recreation Facilities

## 2015 Importance-Unmet Needs Assessment Matrix for North Port Parks and Recreation Facilities

(points on the graph show deviations from the mean importance and unmet need ratings given by respondents to the survey)



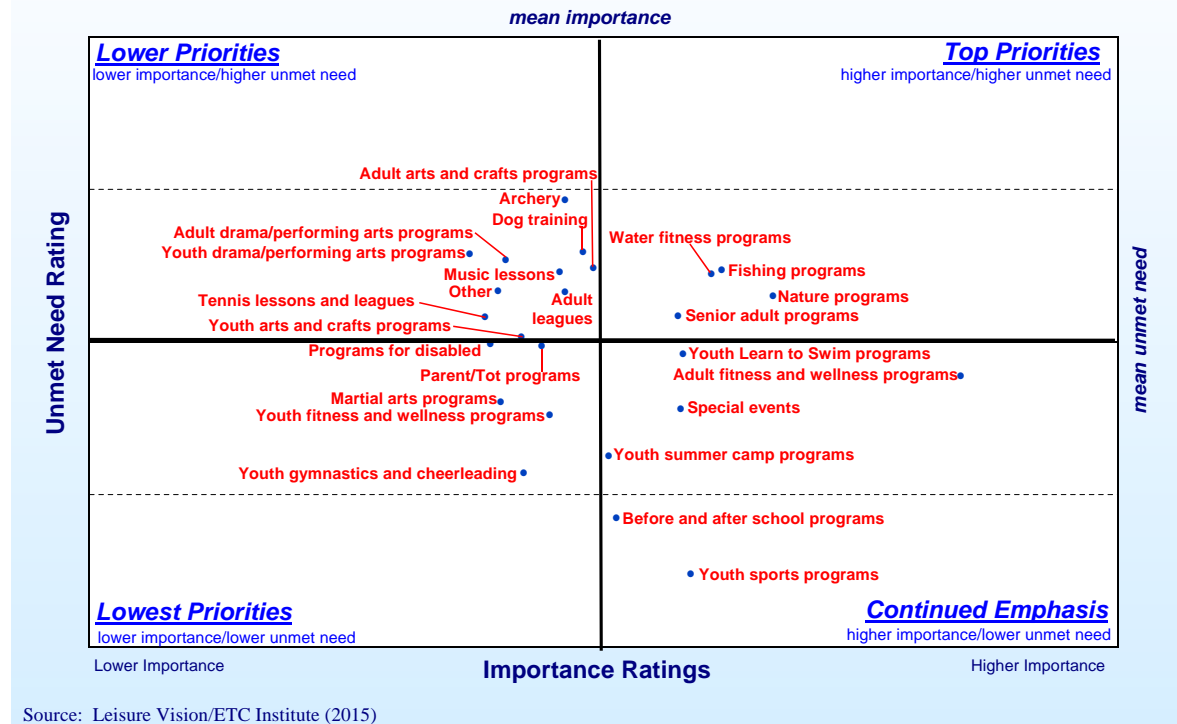
Source: Leisure Vision/ETC Institute (2015)



Figure 2.8b: Importance-Unmet Needs Matrix for Recreation Programs

## 2015 Importance-Unmet Needs Assessment Matrix for North Port Recreation Programs

(points on the graph show deviations from the mean importance and unmet need ratings given by respondents to the survey)



### Lowest Importance

*Lower importance and lower unmet need*

Items in this quadrant should receive the lowest priority for improvement. Respondents placed a lower level of importance on these items, and the unmet need rating is relatively low. This does not mean that no investments should occur for facilities in this quadrant, but the investments need to be proportional to the lower importance and lower unmet need.

When charted according to importance and greatest unmet need, the top priorities for parks and recreation investment are:

- Indoor swimming pools/leisure pools,
- Outdoor swimming pools/water parks, and boating and fishing areas.

Facilities that need continued emphasis are:

- Nature trails, natural areas and wildlife habitats,
- Off-leash dog parks,
- Indoor fitness and exercise facilities,
- Walking/hiking/biking trails,
- Small neighborhood parks,
- Large community parks,
- Picnic areas and shelters, and
- Playground equipment.

In terms of programs, the top priority needs in North Port are:

- Water fitness, fishing, nature, and
- Senior/adult programs.

Continued emphasis is needed to maintain:

- Youth Learn to Swim,
- Adult fitness and wellness,
- Special events,
- Youth summer camps,
- Before/after school programs, and
- Youth sports programs.



## 2.9 Online Survey

A modified version of the survey was placed online to provide another opportunity for residents to participate in the needs assessment process. Over 407 responses were received over the course of 9 weeks. Key findings include:

### Key Survey Findings

- 76 percent of respondents have visited a City park or facility over the past 12 months.
- Walking trails, playgrounds, and picnic areas are the facilities used most by residents.
- Over 89 percent of residents rated the overall physical condition of the City's facilities and amenities they visited as "excellent" or "good."
- 73 percent of respondents have participated in the City's parks and recreation programs.
- Over 83 percent of the respondents rated the quality of the City's programs they participated in as "excellent" or "good."
- 80 percent of those who use City facilities and programs do so because they are "close to home;" 53 percent because of "enjoyment of the outdoors;" and 42 percent because "the facilities are well maintained."
- Outdoor swimming pools/water parks and walking, hiking, biking trails are the most important recreation facilities to respondents' households.
- 53 percent of respondents are "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied" with the overall value received from North Port Parks and Recreation. Respondents were most supportive of the following actions to improve the City's parks and recreation facilities:
  - Develop a new outdoor family aquatic center (i.e. water slides, zero depth entry, interactive water sprays, lap lanes, etc.)
  - Upgrade existing neighborhood and community parks
  - Develop new walking/biking trails and connect existing trails
  - Develop park on the 65 acres adjacent to Warm Mineral Springs
  - Upgrade existing walking and biking trails
- Respondents would allocate \$100 dollars in the following areas:
 

- Development of new aquatic center	\$ 31.49
- Acquisition and development of walking and biking trails	\$ 20.30
- Improvements/maintenance of existing parks, pools, and recreation facilities	\$ 18.47
- Development of new indoor facilities	\$ 11.54
- Other Improvements	\$ 9.89
- Construction of new sports fields (softball, soccer, baseball, etc.)	\$ 8.31
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$100.00</b>
- Sixty-three (63) percent of respondents would be willing to pay \$25 or more per year in user fees for parks and recreation facilities or programs

## 2.10 Level of Service Analysis

There is no industry standard or regulation regarding how a community should establish Levels of Service (LOS) for parks and recreation services. Both NRPA and the Florida State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) have discontinued the use of traditional population-based LOS standards such as acres and facilities per 1,000 residents.

Instead, cities are encouraged to conduct community-wide needs assessments and benchmark themselves against other similar communities in order to establish their own LOS standards. NRPA has developed its benchmarking website PRORAGIS, and SCORP publishes regional LOS averages around the state to assist local communities in establishing their LOS.

For the City of North Port, three different LOS methods were used to determine how well the City's parks and recreation system is meeting residents' needs:

1. Acreage LOS: Measures the quantity of parkland acreage that is available per 1,000 residents.
2. Facilities LOS: Measures the number of residents that have access to a single recreation facility such as a soccer field, baseball field, pool, etc.
3. Access LOS: Illustrates where in the city residents have access to a park or recreation facility with a given distances from their home.

### 2.10.1 Acreage Level of Service

The City's Comprehensive Plan establishes an LOS target of 3 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents, and 7 acres of conservation land/1,000 residents. The parkland LOS is considered a very low target according to industry standards, and should be increased to reflect the high quality of life desired by City leaders and residents. Ideally the City would maintain or increase its current LOS of 8 acres of parkland/1,000 residents.

If the City's population continues to grow as projected, Figure 2.10a indicates that an additional 7 acres of parkland will need to be acquired by 2040 to maintain the minimum LOS standard of 3 acres/1,000 residents. However, if the City wishes to maintain its current LOS of 8 acres/1,000 residents, an additional 432 acres of parkland will need to be acquired by 2040 as indicated by Figure 2.10b.





**Figure 2.10a: Proposed Acreage Level of Service, 2014-2040**

			2014*		2020^		2025^		2030^		2035^		2040^	
City Population			60,380		74,635		88,513		101,926		114,353		126,605	
Park Acreage Type	Acreage	City of North Port Comprehensive Plan Acreage LOS Target	Acres per 1,000 Population	Acreage (Need) / Surplus	Acres per 1,000 Population	Acreage (Need) / Surplus	Acres per 1,000 Population	Acreage (Need) / Surplus	Acres per 1,000 Population	Acreage (Need) / Surplus	Acres per 1,000 Population	Acreage (Need) / Surplus	Acres per 1,000 Population	Acreage (Need) / Surplus
Total Acreage	581	3.0	8.0	399	6.5	357	5.5	315	4.8	275	4.2	237	3.8	201
Community Parks	183	1.5	2.4	92	1.9	71	1.6	50	1.4	30	1.3	11	1.1	(7)
Open Space Parks	338	1.5	5.7	247	4.6	226	3.9	205	3.4	185	3.0	166	2.7	148

**Figure 2.10b: Acreage Level of Service, Maintaining Current LOS Standard of 8 acres per 1,000 population, 2014-2040**

			2014*		2020^		2025^		2030^		2035^		2040^	
City Population			60,380		74,635		88,513		101,926		114,353		126,605	
Park Acreage Type	Acreage	LOS Target	Acreage Target	Acreage (Need) / Surplus	Acreage Target	Acreage (Need) / Surplus	Acreage Target	Acreage (Need) / Surplus	Acreage Target	Acreage (Need) / Surplus	Acreage Target	Acreage (Need) / Surplus	Acreage Target	Acreage (Need) / Surplus
Total Acreage	485	8.0	483.0	98	597.1	(16)	708.1	(127)	815.4	(234)	914.8	(333)	1,012.8	(431)
Community Parks	143	4.0	241.5	(59)	298.5	(115)	354.1	(171)	407.7	(225)	457.4	(274)	506.4	(323)
Open Space Parks	342	4.0	241.5	97	298.5	39	354.1	(16)	407.7	(69)	457.4	(119)	506.4	(168)

\*Source: U.S. Census

^Source: Southwest Florida Water Management District



**Figure 2.10c: City of North Port Facilities Level of Service, 2014-2040**

		2014*	2020^	2025^	2030^	2035^	2040^
City Population		60,380	74,635	88,513	101,926	114,353	126,605
Recreation Facility	Qty.	Facility per # Residents	Facility per # Residents	Facility per # Residents	Facility per # Residents	Facility per # Residents	Facility per # Residents
Diamond Fields	14	4,313	5,331	6,322	7,280	8,168	9,043
Baseball Fields	9	6,709	8,293	9,835	11,325	12,706	14,067
Softball Fields	5	12,076	14,927	17,703	20,385	22,871	25,321
Rectangular Fields	8	7,548	9,329	11,064	12,721	14,294	15,826
Boat Ramps	3	20,127	24,878	29,504	33,975	38,118	42,202
Playgrounds	10	6,038	7,464	8,851	10,193	11,435	12,661
Dog Parks	1	60,380	74,635	88,513	101,926	114,352	126,605
Tennis Courts	4	15,095	18,659	22,128	25,482	28,588	31,651
Basketball Courts	6	10,063	12,439	14,752	16,988	19,059	21,101
Indoor Recreation Center	4	15,095	18,659	22,128	25,482	28,588	31,651
Indoor Recreation Center (SF)	56,175	0.93	0.75	0.63	0.55	0.49	0.44
Swimming Pools	1	60,380	74,635	88,513	101,926	114,352	126,605

\*Source: U.S. Census

^Source: Southwest Florida Water Management District

**Figure 2.10d: National Recreation and Parks Association PRORAGIS Benchmark**

City Population	2014 City of North Port Facilities LOS	National Benchmark			
		Lower Quartile	Median	Upper Quartile	Average
Recreation Facility	Facility per # Residents	Facility per # Residents	Facility per # Residents	Facility per # Residents	Facility per # Residents
Diamond Fields	4,313	1,916	3,333	5,837	7,127
Multi-purpose Fields (Rectangular Fields)	7,548	2,205	3,929	8,124	7,899
Playgrounds	6,038	2,111	3,899	6,667	7,801
Dog Parks	60,380	27,000	53,915	101,372	84,331
Tennis Courts	15,095	2,725	4,413	8,637	7,686
Basketball Courts	10,063	4,583	7,526	14,055	15,123
Indoor Recreation Center	15,095	13,942	24,804	46,358	35,092
Swimming Pools	60,380	16,585	33,660	57,149	46,439

Source: NRPA, 2015

## 2.10.2 Facilities Level of Service

Each community must establish its own standards for Facilities LOS, expressed as the number of facilities required to serve the population. However, it is sometimes useful to compare the number of facilities to state and national averages.

Figure 2.10c shows the existing and anticipated number of North Port residents served by existing facilities. When compared to Figure 2.10d, NRPA's PRORAGIS database, it appears that the City's existing Facilities LOS is lower than the national median for every facility type except indoor



**Figure 2.10e: State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan Benchmark**

Outdoor Facility Type	South West Region Resident Participation	2020 South West Region LOS X/1000 Participant	Number of Facilities in City of North Port	City of North Port Existing LOS (2014) X/1000 Pop. Based on Regional Participation	(Need) / Surplus to meet South West Region LOS	(Need) / Surplus to meet South West Region LOS by 2020	(Need) / Surplus to meet South West Region LOS by 2025	(Need) / Surplus to meet South West Region LOS by 2030	(Need) / Surplus to meet South West Region LOS by 2035	(Need) / Surplus to meet South West Region LOS by 2040
Baseball Fields	11%	0.85	9	1.36	3	2	1	(1)	(2)	(3)
Outdoor Basketball Courts	9%	0.86	6	1.10	1	0	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Football Fields (Multi-Purpose Fields)	9%	0.48	8	1.47	5	5	4	4	3	3
Tennis Courts	13%	1.46	4	0.51	(7)	(10)	(13)	(15)	(18)	(20)
Soccer (Multi-Purpose Fields)	10%	0.45	8	1.32	5	5	4	3	3	2
Outdoor Swimming Pools	28%	0.09	1	0.06	(1)	(1)	(1)	(2)	(2)	(2)
Saltwater Boat Ramps	25%	0.16	3	0.20	1	0	(1)	(1)	(2)	(3)

recreation centers. When compared to Figure 2.10e, the state of Florida database in the SCORP, it appears that the City's Facilities LOS is currently lower than other communities in the southwest region for tennis courts and outdoor swimming pools. If the City's population continues to grow as projected, the Facilities LOS will also be lower than other communities in the region for baseball fields, outdoor basketball courts, multi-purpose/ soccer fields, and saltwater boat ramps if no additional facilities are constructed.



### 2.10.3 Access Level of Service

Access LOS measures the distance residents have to travel to access parks and recreation facilities. Similar to other LOS metrics, each community must determine its own standards. Access LOS may be determined based on recreational lifestyles, land use patterns, transportation networks, population densities and/or other variables.

The City of North Port Comprehensive Plan Parks and Open Space Element established the following Access LOS standards:

- 3 Mile Radius for Community Parks
- ½ Mile Radius for Neighborhood Parks

Informed by these standards and industry best practices, the following Access LOS analysis parameters were established to conduct Access LOS analysis of the City's park system:

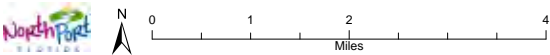
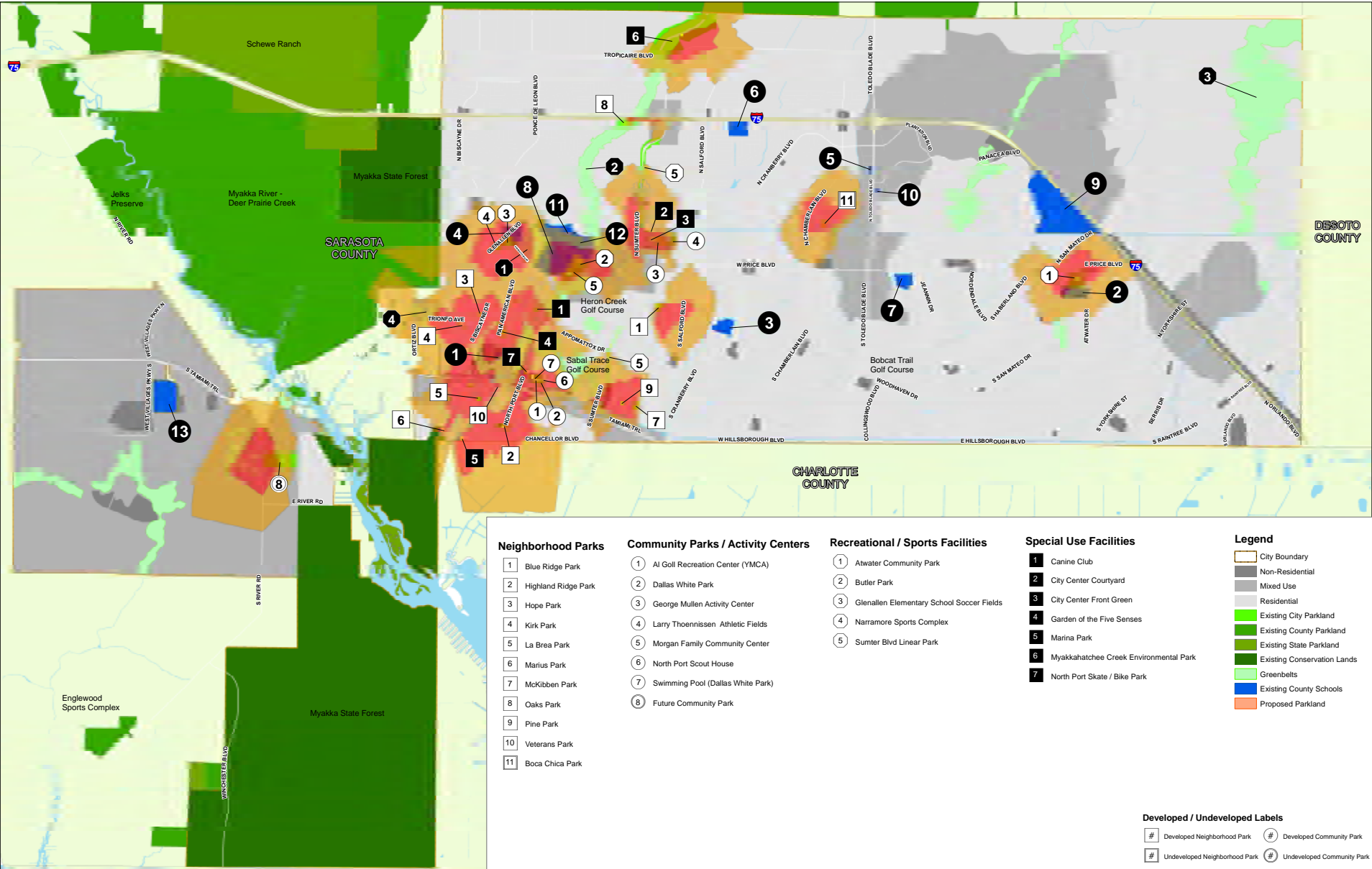
- |                                      |                 |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------|
| • All Parks                          | ½ mile + 1 mile |
| • All Neighborhood + Community Parks | ½ mile          |
| • Community Parks                    | 3 miles         |
| • Community Centers                  | 3 miles         |
| • Off-Leash Dog Parks                | 3 miles         |
| • Swimming Pools                     | 3 + 5 miles     |
| • Play Areas                         | ½ mile          |
| • Boat Ramps                         | 3 miles         |
| • Trails                             | ½ mile          |
| • Trails + Bike Lanes and Routes     | ½ mile          |

Figures 2.10f – 2.10i show where the gaps are in the community for all parks using 1/2 mile and 1 mile LOS Access service area, Community Parks using a 3 mile LOS Access service area, and Trails using a 1/2 mile buffer LOS Access area.

Based on this Access LOS Analysis, it appears that the City needs all of the parks and facilities analyzed; particularly in the central and eastern portions of the City.



Figure 2.10f: Access LOS for All Parks using 1/2 Mile and 1 Mile Access LOS Service Area



LOS of All Parks at 1/2 Mile and 1 Mile Distances  
City of North Port, FL  
Recreation and Parks Facilities Master Plan Base Map

Figure 2.10g: Access LOS for Neighborhood and Community Parks using 1/2 Mile Access LOS Service Area

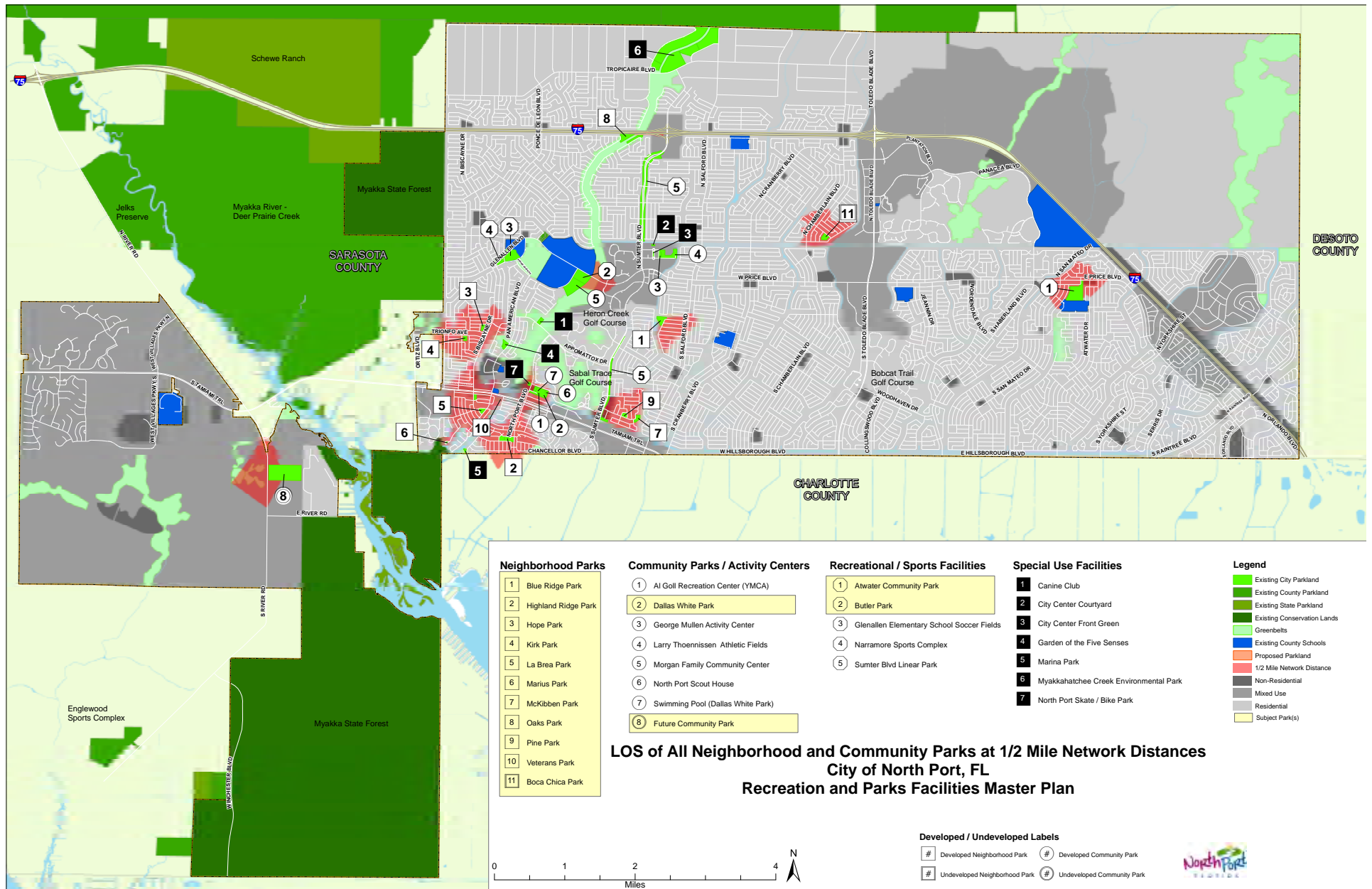
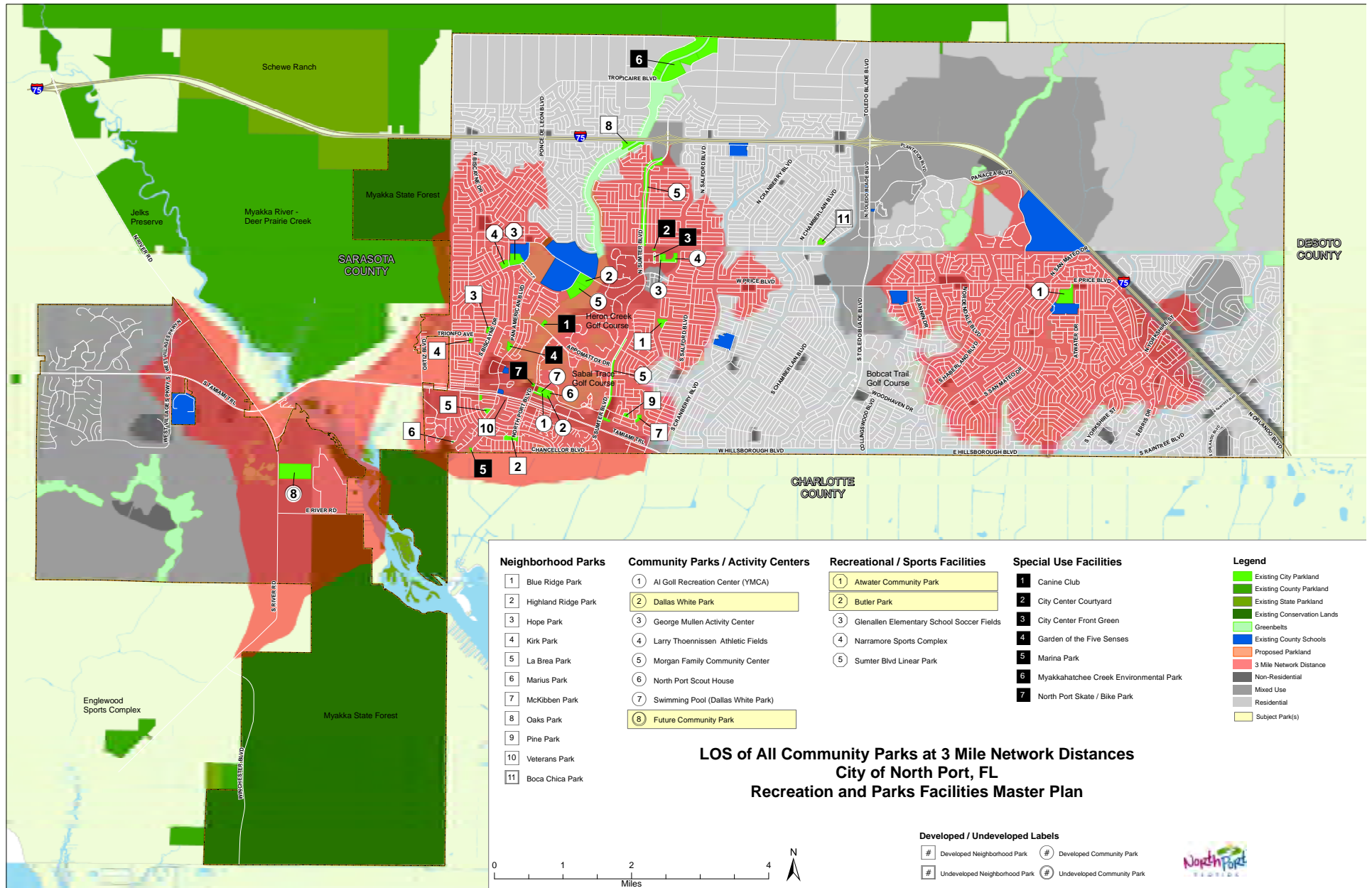




Figure 2.10h: Access LOS for Community Parks using 3 Mile Access LOS Service Area



**LOS of Trails at 1/2 Mile Network Distances**  
**City of North Port, FL**  
**Recreation and Parks Facilities Master Plan**

**Legend**

- Existing City Parkland
- Existing County Parkland
- Existing State Parkland
- Existing Conservation Lands
- Greenbelts
- Existing County Schools
- Proposed Parkland
- Boardwalk
- General Use Trail
- Multuse Trail
- Paddle Trail
- Proposed Multuse Trail
- Trails 1/2 Mile Network Distance
- Non-Residential
- Mixed Use
- Residential

0 1 2 4 Miles

North

NorthPort FL

## 2.11 Needs Summary

Based on all of the analysis described in the previous sections, Figure 2.11a to the right lists the top priority park land and facilities needs as well as the top priority recreation program needs. It is important to note that findings from the mail/ telephone survey were given more “weight” because it is the only statistically representative technique.

Figure 2.11b on the following page illustrates the priority needs identified from each of the different needs assessment techniques, while still giving the mail/telephone survey more weight than the other techniques.

**Figure 2.11a: Top Priority Park Land, Facilities, and Recreation Program Needs**

### **Top Priority Needs for Park Land and Facilities**

- Indoor/ Outdoor Leisure Pool, Aquatics Center
- Boating and Fishing Area, Ramps

### **Secondary Priority Needs for Park Land and Facilities (Continued Emphasis )**

- Access, Connectivity, Trails, Greenways
- More Things to Do, Improvements to Existing Parks
- Multi-purpose Athletic Fields
- Indoor Fitness and Exercise Facilities
- Additional Parkland, Neighborhood Parks, Community Parks
- Natural Areas and Wildlife Habitats
- Off-leash Dog Parks
- Picnic Areas and Shelters
- Playground Equipment

### **Top Priority Needs for Recreation Programs**

- Water Fitness Programs
- Nature Programs
- Fishing Programs
- Senior Adult Programs

### **Secondary Priority Needs for Recreation Programs**

- Youth Learn-to-Swim Programs
- Adult Fitness and Wellness Programs
- Special Events
- Youth Summer Camp Programs
- Before-After School Programs
- Youth Sports Programs



Figure 2.11b: Needs Summary

	Needs Assessment Techniques									
	2.1 Site Evaluations	2.2 Recreation Programs and Facilities	2.3 Division Operations and Maintenance Practices	2.4 City Commission/ Manager Interviews	2.5 Focus Groups	2.6 Community Meetings	2.7 Meeting in a Box	2.8 Mail/ Telephone Survey	2.9 Online Survey	2.10 LOS Analysis
<b>Top Priorities:</b>										
<b>Facilities</b>										
Indoor/ Outdoor Leisure Pool, Aquatics Center						●	●	●	●	●
Boating and Fishing Area, Ramps								●		●
<b>Programs</b>										
Water Fitness Programs								●		
Nature Programs								●	●	
Fishing Programs								●		
Senior Adult Programs								●		
<b>Secondary Priorities, Continued Emphasis:</b>										
<b>Facilities</b>										
Access, Connectivity, Trails, Greenways	●			●	●	●	●	●	●	●
More Things to Do, Improvements to Existing Parks	●				●	●	●	●	●	
Multi-purpose Athletic Fields		●		●	●					●
Indoor Fitness and Exercise Facilities						●		●		●
Additional Parkland, Neighborhood Parks, Community Parks								●	●	●
Natural Areas and Wildlife Habitats								●		
Community Centers		●								●
Off-leash Dog Parks								●		●
Picnic Areas and Shelters								●		
Playground Equipment								●		●



	Needs Assessment Techniques									
	2.1 Site Evaluations	2.2 Recreation Programs and Facilities	2.3 Division Operations and Maintenance Practice	2.4 City Commission/ Manager Interviews	2.5 Focus Groups	2.6 Community Meetings	2.7 Meeting in a Box	2.8 Mail/ Telephone Survey	2.9 Online Survey	2.10 LOS Analysis
<b>Secondary Priorities, Continued Emphasis:</b>										
<b>Programs</b>										
Youth Learn-to-Swim Programs								●	●	
Adult Fitness and Wellness Programs								●	●	
Special Events								●		
Youth Summer Camp Programs								●		
Before-After School Programs								●		
Youth Sports Programs								●		
Other Needs:										
<b>Facilities</b>										
Improved Buildings	●									
Indoor/ Outdoor Gathering Spaces					●					
Improved Communications			●		●					
Tennis Courts										●
Basketball Courts										●
<b>Programs</b>										
Adult Dance/ Performing Arts Programs								●		

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3.0

# Visioning





City of North Port staff and stakeholders met with the Toole Design Group team on October 28, 2015 to develop a long range parks and recreation vision in response to community needs and priorities. About 40 residents and staff attended the meetings held at the Morgan Family Center. The agenda for the day-long visioning workshop included:

- *Staff discussion*
- *Trails, Greenways and Blueways*
- *Eco-Tourism*
- *Parks, Recreation and Place Making*
- *Aquatic Facilities and Water Access*

Findings from the visioning workshop, 2017 Strategic Plan, Capital Improvement Program and 2006 Parks & Recreation Master Plan formed the basis for the City of North Port Parks and Recreation Master Plan Long Range Vision.

### 3.1 Staff Discussion

The staff discussion established a framework for the long range vision. First, it is anticipated that project funding will be determined annually, based on Commission priorities. Potential funding sources may include, but not be limited to, ad valorem taxes, county surtax, bonds special assessments, impact fees, user fees, grants, donations, public-private partnerships, and/or other sources. Second, the ten-year vision should focus on priorities established each year by City Commission. Top priorities from the 2016 needs assessment include:

- Construction of a new aquatic center at Butler Park



- Multi-purpose fields, including \$1.8 million for 3 new fields and redevelopment of 1 existing field at Butler Park as illustrated in Figure 3.1a. Project completed in 2017.
- Development of the Myakkahatchee Greenway for walking, bicycling, and kayaking
- Improvements to the front green space at City Center
- Trail connections and amphitheater
- Improvements to parks including water fountains, accessories, sidewalk connections, fitness/exercise stations, and basketball courts

Additionally, the 2017 strategic planning process identified the following priorities:

- Warm Mineral Springs Master Plan
- Trail Development-Heron Creek
- Youth Sports Agreement
- Deer Prairie Creek Connector Bridge
- Sidewalk Master Plan and Policy: Review/Refinement
- West Villages 63 Acre Park and Atlanta Braves Stadium
- Parks & Recreation Master Plan

### 3.2 Eco-Tourism

North Port's vision for eco-tourism is to provide convenient access to surrounding resource-based recreation opportunities including boating, paddling, biking, hiking, bird-watching and swimming. Some of the most popular suggested eco-tourism activities include:

- Paddling from the Marina Park launch, down the Myakkahatchee Creek to the Myakka River
- Swimming and picnicking at Warm Mineral Springs Park
- Hiking at Myakkahatchee Creek Environmental Park
- Future hiking at Little Salt Springs
- Host Rhode Scholars programs
- Hiking, bird watching, kayaking at Deer Prairie Creek located just outside City limits

A key component of the City's vision is to enhance existing visitor experiences through improvements such as:

- A restroom at Myakkahatchee Park
- A habitat garden and educational exhibits at Warm Mineral Springs Park
- Equestrian trails near Warm Mineral Springs Park
- Additional land for habitat protection and connectivity along the Myakkahatchee Creek Greenway
- Improved water quality and habitat in the City's canals, including floating bio-mats/floating

**Figure 3.1a Butler Park Multi-Purpose Field Schematic Design**



- islands that provide littoral zone plantings
- Signature trails experience along canals
- Enhanced long-leaf pine canopy, protected through an updated tree ordinance
- Wildlife habitat and tree canopy inventory and strategy, to direct investments
- Trail maps, trailheads, kiosks, way-finding signs (on and off-road)
- Future trail connections between Little Salt Springs and Myakkahatchee Greenway
- Brand the North Port eco-tourism experience, e.g. the “Three Springs Eco-Heritage Area” with the Sophie Johnstone fountain as a symbol
- Create a brochure to describe available natural experiences, including an updated directory of concessionaires, guides, accommodations, and related support services

### 3.2.1 Warm Mineral Springs Park

A key component of the eco-tourism vision is to improve the visitor experience at the City’s signature natural attraction, Warm Mineral Springs Park. A detailed Master Plan process was initiated in 2017 for the entire site evaluating both natural and man-made opportunities constraints for development and preservation, cost-recovery goals for the site (e.g. 100 percent cost recovery for programs and events, 50 percent cost recovery for site management and operations), and a market study to determine the types of uses that could generate the desired revenues. Preliminary ideas to improve the Springs include:

#### Improve access, connectivity, and curb appeal of Warm Mineral Springs Park site

- Add sidewalks and walkways to improve access form adjacent areas
- Improve the parking lot at Warm Mineral Springs

- Park (completed October 2017)
- Sarasota County to refurbish the Three Graces Fountain
- Lower prices for residents; provide a free day to encourage attendance
- Provide opportunities for fishing downstream from Warm Mineral Springs Park; also explore opportunities to extend into adjacent parkland

#### Upgrade or replace existing buildings to become more attractive and functional

- Add city sewer and water and new bathrooms at Warm Mineral Springs Park
- Provide more visitor amenities, including food and beverage services
- Improve water clarity and the swimming experience
- Restore the Cyclorama (possibly one of only four remaining in the United States)
- Provide playgrounds, youth fitness, special needs programs
- Add a pavilion, reception area, and other spaces for weddings and special events

#### Develop a separate strategy for the 62 acres next to Warm Mineral Springs Park

- Provide fitness/exercise facilities and classes, including a walking trail with fitness stations and programs such as yoga in the park, 5K’s and the like, on the 62 acre site
- Acquire land to connect Warm Mineral Springs Park to Deer Prairie Creek
- Restore scrub to become a receiver site for gopher tortoises
- Develop a habitat garden or certified wildlife area with trails
- Add historical and educational exhibits
- Provide opportunities for kayaking
- Add wildlife habitat and educational trails

- Add an amphitheater

### 3.3 Trails, Greenways and Blueways

The City of North Port Trails, Greenways, and Blueways Vision builds on existing trails and projects currently including the existing Sumter Linear Park and Phase 1 of the Canal Creek Master Plan. The backbone of the proposed Trails, Greenways, and Blueways Vision is the Myakkahatchee Creek Greenway, which traverses the city in a north-south orientation. It has the potential to provide the City’s signature trail experience and connect residents to a variety of parks along the greenway including Dallas White Park, Canine Club, Butler Park, Oaks Park, Myakkahatchee Creek Environmental Park and the Carlton Reserve.

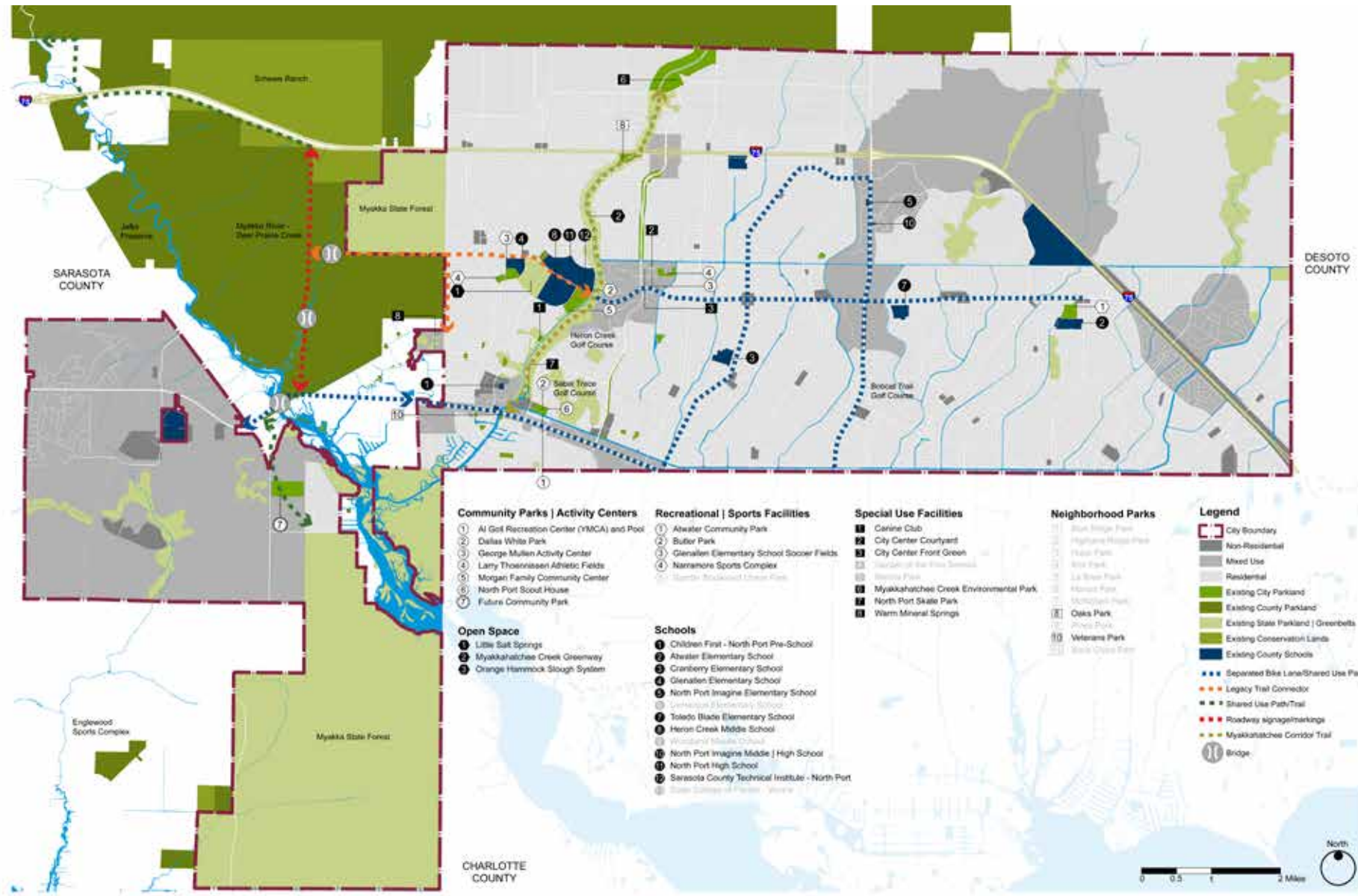
Consistent with the findings from the Needs Assessment, participants of the Visioning Workshop felt that the City of North Port should continue to implement the Myakkahatchee Creek Greenway Master Plan. Specific priorities include completing the acquisition of remaining lots along the Myakkahatchee Creek and, implementing a nature or gravel trail along the entire length of greenway. A connection to the Carlton Reserve from the Myakkahatchee Creek Environmental Park was completed in 2016 and a one-mile section of trail from Price Blvd. to Appomattox Blvd. is being constructed in 2018. Design for a trailhead parking lot at the southern end of the Greenway was completed in 2017.

The Trails, Greenways, and Blueways Vision also includes a connection to Sarasota County’s Legacy Trail in the North West Portion of the City. This connection can be accomplished by a series





Figure 3.3a Trails, Greenways, and Blueways Vision Plan



of bridge improvements, signage and markings on paved roadways, and connecting gaps with shared use pathways. Figure 3.3a illustrates the conceptual alignment of the connection trail. It also shows the potential east-west connection to Price Boulevard and south to Warm Mineral Springs Park.

The Trails, Greenways, and Blueways Vision also proposes the use of high-quality on-street bicycle facilities to cost-effectively extend the reach of the City's bicycle network. Many of these can be included efficiently as the City conducts routine roadway maintenance capital improvements, such as roadway resurfacing and lane marking enhancements. Figure 3.3b illustrates these facilities. Specific improvements may include buffered cycle tracks, bike boxes to allow queuing space for waiting cyclists, and crossing markings through the intersections to highlight the desired pathway for riders. Figure 3.3c illustrates how some of these facilities may be integrated

into intersections to provide safer crossings for pedestrians and cyclist. In some cases a bicycle signal and phasing will need to be added to the traffic signal timing to give cyclists their own phase to cross larger roadways. While the Vision provides preliminary routes to be considered for high-quality bicycle facilities, additional analysis would be needed to determine the feasibility of these improvements.

Equestrian trails are also an important part of City's Trails, Greenways, and Blueways Vision. The main need is to continue to allow and maintain the use of equestrian trails and to protect equestrian access to properties. Key trail locations to protect include areas that parallel I-75 to the north.

An important component of the City's vision is to enhance existing visitor experiences throughout the trails, greenways, and blueways system. Improvements include adding more trailheads,

providing opportunities to rent boats, paddleboats or kayaks, provide benches near the water and at key viewing locations, and adding exercise areas. This would provide opportunities for bird watching and for active seniors.

### 3.4 Parks, Recreation and Place Making

Many of the parks and recreation needs in North Port relate to the national trend of “Placemaking” – the concept of designing all parks, preserves and recreation facilities as great public spaces. The Project for Public Spaces, a recognized leader in placemaking, proposes eight relevant strategies to help parks achieve their full potential as great places:

1. Make park management a central concern

Figure 3.3b High-Quality On-Street Bicycle Facilities

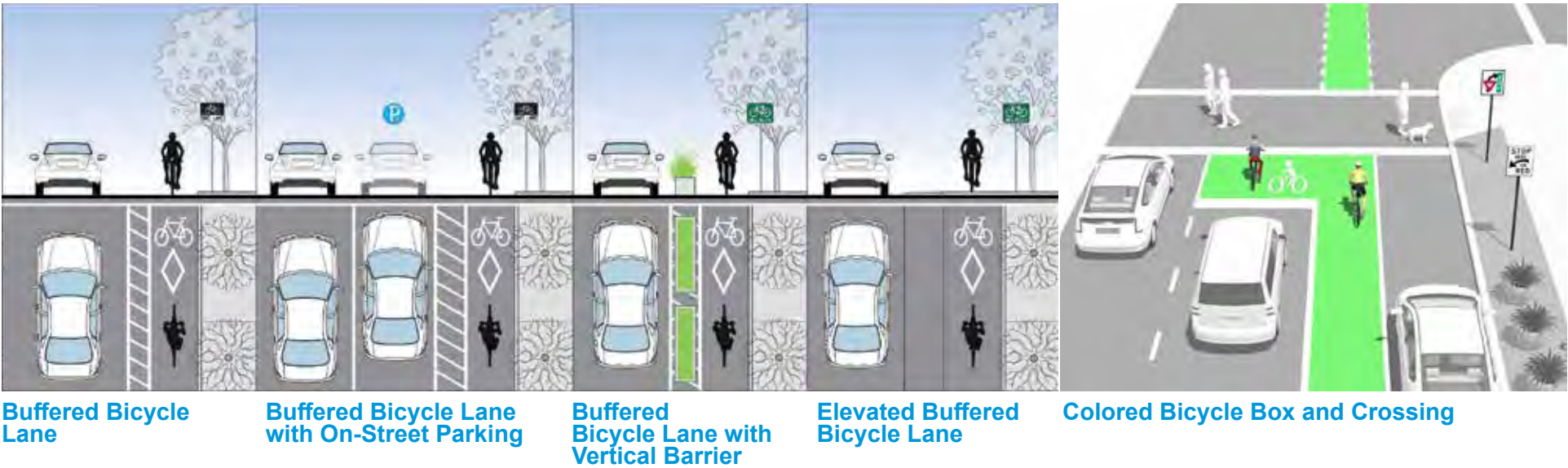
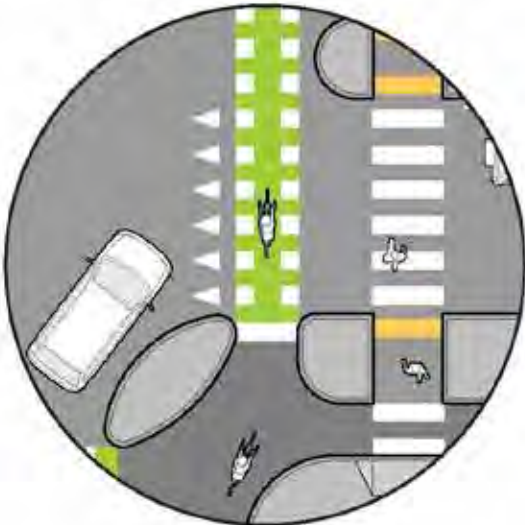
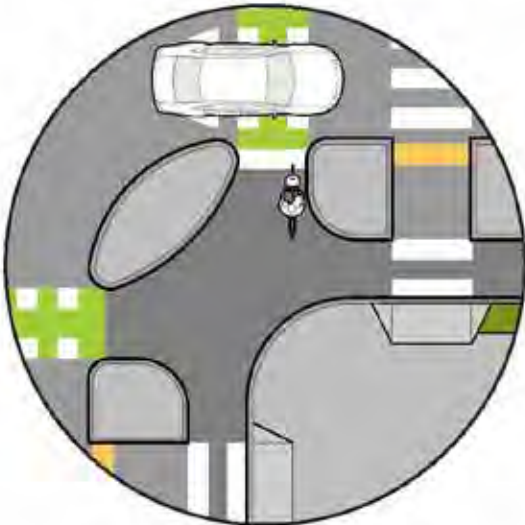




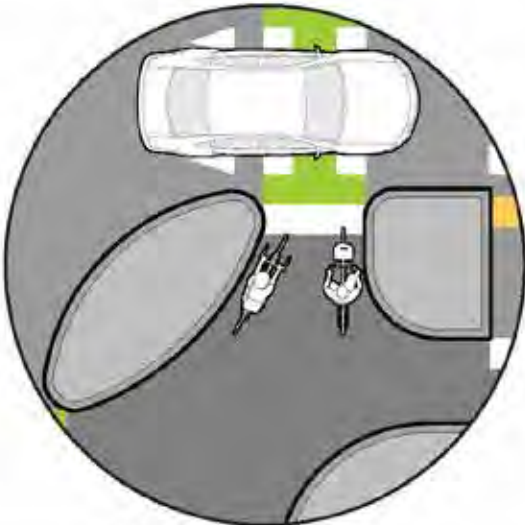
Figure 3.3c High-Quality On-Street Bicycle Facility Intersection Crossing



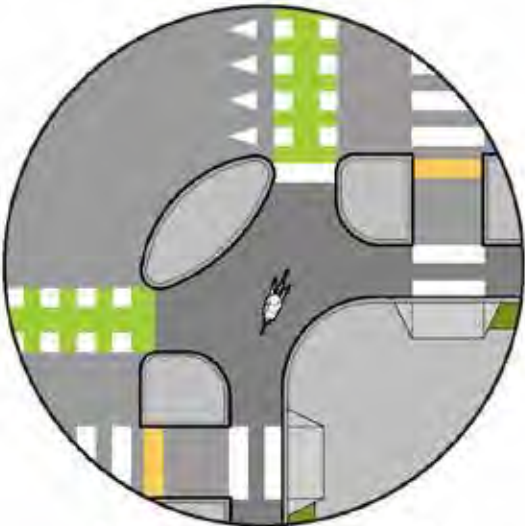
Bicycle crossing



Bicycle stop line



Bicycle queuing area



Corner deflection island



Pedestrian ramps



Pedestrian crossing



2. Develop strategies to attract people during all seasons
3. Acquire diverse funding sources
4. Design the park layout for flexibility
5. Consider both the “inner park” and “outer park”
6. Provide amenities for the different groups of people using the park
7. Create attractions and destinations throughout the park
8. Create an identity and image for the park

Figure 3.4a shows the four key attributes of great places (center circle), characteristics of each attribute, and metrics or indicators of success as a public space.

The long range vision for North Port parks is to gradually improve and transform every City park into a great public space based upon 1) the



**Figure 3.4a PPS Placemaking Characteristics**

needs of the parks constituents (e.g., neighborhood, community, City-wide) and 2) the principles outlined above. North Port staff and stakeholders listed the following potential improvements that could help accomplish this vision:

#### Facility Improvements:

- Pedestrian paths, walking trails, bridges
- Interactive games (e.g., outdoor chess, ping pong tables)
- Trees/forested areas
- Playgrounds
- Cleaner parks/less litter
- Open grass spaces
- Basketball courts
- Tennis courts
- Wi-Fi
- Power outlets for chargers
- Fitness equipment
- Moveable chairs and tables
- Gliders and slides
- Stage for theater
- Outside movies
- Pickleball courts
- Pick-up games
- Numerous small shade structures for multiple groups
- Large capacity pavilions in key parks
- Improvements to canals, boat, canoe, and kayak ramps for fishing and water access
- Zip line, challenge ropes course
- Restrooms
- Food trucks
- Outdoor volleyball courts
- Bike racks, air and water stations

#### Program Improvements:

- Dog friendly parks that allow dogs on leashes
- Healthy/basic cooking classes
- Programs such as hip-hop classes
- Affinity clubs (e.g. biking, walking, running 5k runs, special event venues)
- Art-in-the-park programs

Section 2.1 Site Evaluations found in pages 56-78 suggest specific park improvements where these facility and program improvements should be considered for implementation as part of the long range vision for North Port Parks. The City may consider completing park improvement workshops with area residents to confirm these improvements.

As mentioned previously, since the completion of the site evaluations in 2015, several of the recommended improvements have been implemented as part of the City's placemaking initiatives. In addition, 16 City parks have been designated as dog-friendly.

Additionally, the long range vision for North Port parks prioritizes proposed ideas and improvements from previously developed park master plans based on stakeholder input. Figures 3.4b through 3.4d show the previously developed park master plans for the Dallas White Park, Garden of the Five Senses, and 63 Acre Park and identifies ideas and improvements that the City should implement.

### 3.5 Indoor Recreation Centers

Indoor recreation centers play an important role in meeting residents' needs, and creating great places. The current vision is to continue to improve the visitor experience at the City's existing Morgan Family Community Center (33,000 square feet) and George Mullen Activity Center (12,500 square feet). Combined, these two centers generally meet the

Figure 3.4b Dallas White Park Master Plan (2008)

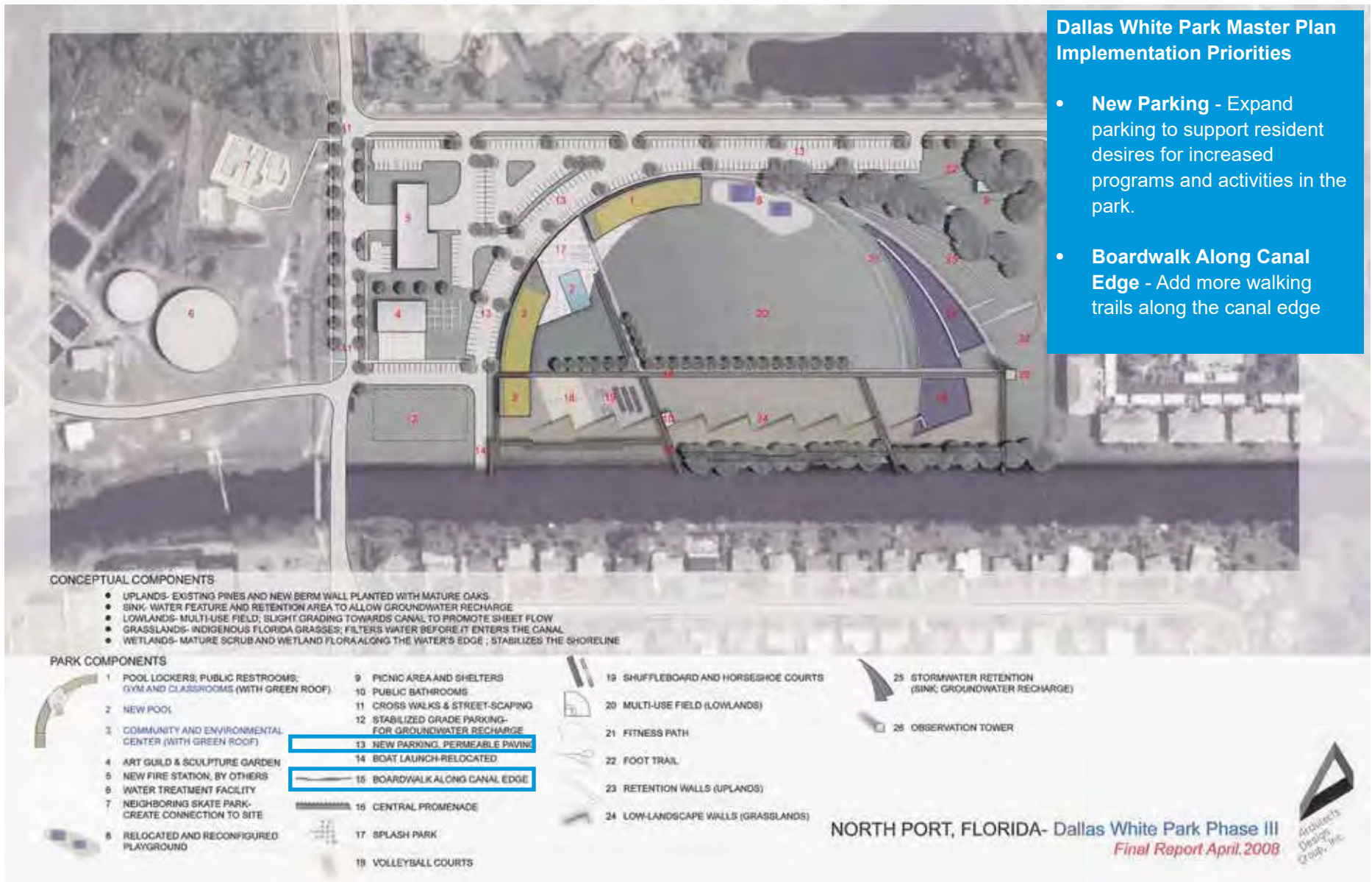




Figure 3.4c Garden of the Five Senses Park Master Plan (2003)



### Garden of the Five Senses Park Master Plan Implementation Priorities

- **Information Center** - Build center to support resident desires to increase nature programs and classes.
- **Playground**- Build Boundless Playground on undeveloped land on west side of property.





[illegible]

- Build the park as a regional park in partnership with Sarasota County. The park should include a variety of facilities for residents of all ages and be designed to preserve and integrate natural areas as part of the park experience.

industry “rule-of-thumb standard” of one square foot of indoor recreation space per City resident.

Suggestions for improving the recreation center experience include:

- Monitor demand to determine if expanding operating hours to include evenings, Sundays, and holidays is appropriate
- Reduce fees for meeting and event space to encourage and increase participation
- Provide more indoor basketball and volleyball programs
- Add food and beverage service via concessions, cafes, and/or food trucks
- Add more comfortable seating
- Add more electrical outlets
- Provide culinary classes and a young chef’s academy (perhaps in conjunction with the proposed food service)
- Add art and music teaching studios
- Add kayak racks, a sauna/steam room, a bike storage room, golf cart parking, and indoor climbing wall adventure (package)
- Provide more exercise/fitness classes, equipment, and functional training space for yoga, spin, Zumba, line dancing, martial arts, TRX, Body Pump, etc.
- Provide year-round, regularly scheduled musical performance series in both indoor and outdoor venues (to vary seasonally)

Since this analysis was completed, several of the suggestions for improving the recreation center experience have been implemented.

In the future, one or more new recreation centers may be required to meet the needs of residents

living on the east side of the City. The vision includes joint planning with the County, the School Board, developers and others to secure land and funding for the future center(s).

### 3.6 Athletic Fields

While there is County-wide demand for athletics fields for travel teams and sports tourism, the City of North Port’s vision is to focus on providing facilities for traditional, local recreation leagues including soccer, football, and lacrosse. These programs require large, rectangular, multi-purpose fields. The City constructed 3 new fields and redeveloped 1 existing field in 2017 at Butler Park, which should meet most of the City’s needs for the next five years. Similar to the recreation center vision, the vision for athletics fields also includes joint planning with the County, School Board, the Sarasota County Technical Institute, developers and/or others to meet the need of existing and future residents to the east.

In the future, the City would like to explore the potential of negotiating the inter-local agreement between Sarasota County and the City regarding the scheduling, capital improvements, and maintenance of the athletic fields. Since this analysis was completed, the City of North Port was presented with the opportunity to partner with Sarasota County and the West Villages Improvement District for construction of a new Alanta Braves Spring Training Complex. The City has committed to 4.7 million in sales tax money towards the project which will also provide access to recreational fields and special event space in North Port.

## 3.7 Aquatic Facilities and Water Access

The needs assessment indicated that residents’ top two priorities are:

- Indoor/outdoor leisure pool, aquatics center
- Boating and fishing area, ramps

### 3.7.1 Family Aquatic Center

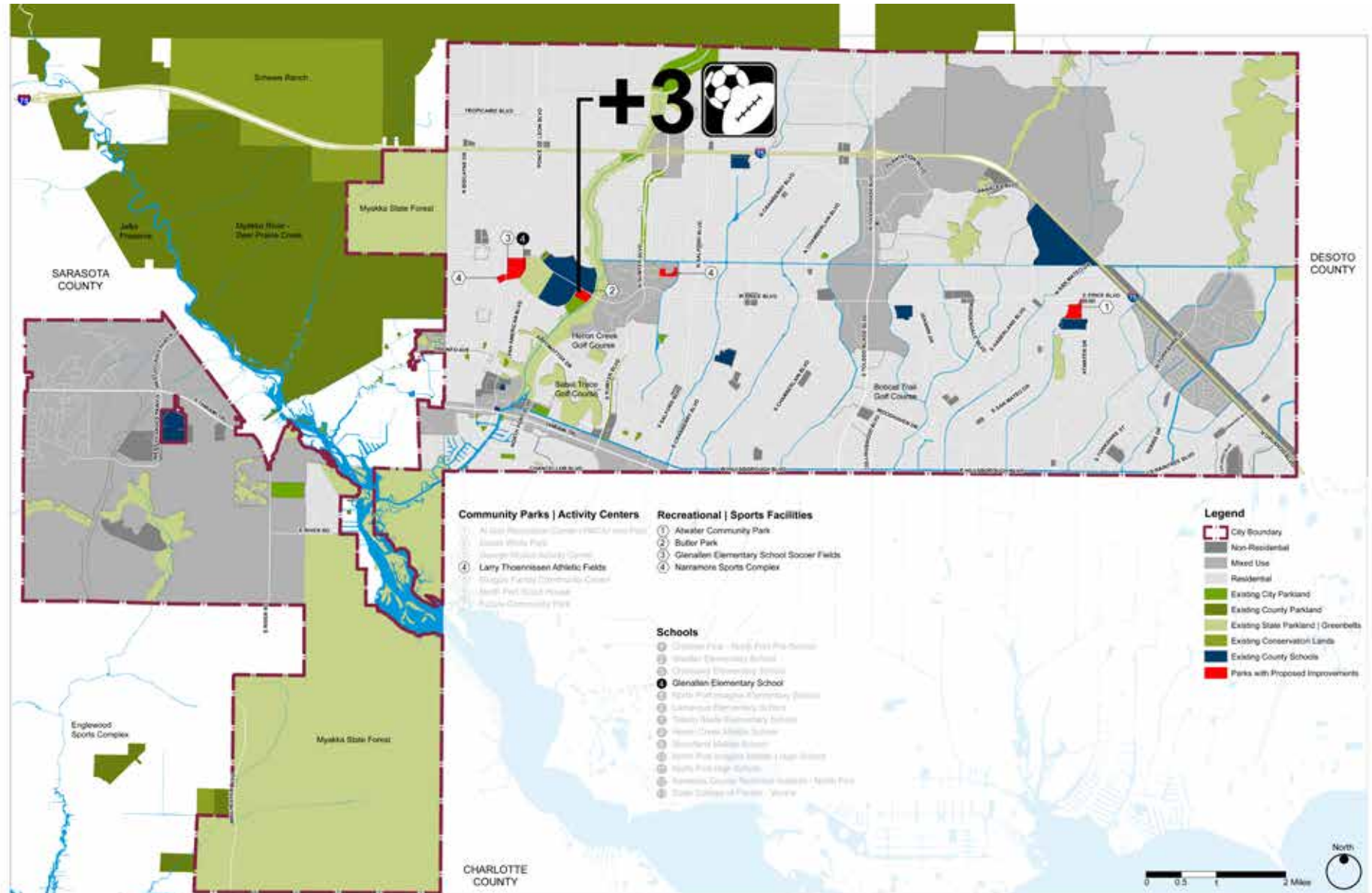
The vision for an Aquatic Center is to construct a new family water park, including a 25-meter stretch pool, a lazy river, a kids activity pool with zero entry, two body flumes, a bowl slide, shade structures, a bath house with locker rooms, a small concession area, fencing and other associated amenities. The Aquatic Center will be located at Butler Park and is estimated to be complete by May of 2019.

It is anticipated that the new facility will serve the aquatics needs of most City residents for at least the next five to ten years. Eventually, as noted in the City’s Aquatics Master Plan, the City may need to build a second aquatics facility in the future to meet the needs of eastern North Port residents, perhaps in partnership with the YMCA, County, School Board, and/or other partner.





Figure 3.6a Athletic Fields Vision Plan





### 3.7.2 Water Access

Much of North Port's appeal as both a residential and recreation destination is the abundant access to water for boating, fishing, canoeing and kayaking. The City's canoeing and kayaking brochure notes that the City offers "nearly 80 miles of freshwater canals, 9 miles of the Myakkahatchee Creek, and a portion of the lower Myakka River" which leads to Charlotte Harbor and the Gulf of Mexico.

The City's vision for water access is to continue to improve the recreation experience. Ideas include:

- Implement Myakkahatchee Greenway Master Plan, striving to provide a unique canoeing and kayaking experience
- Implement Phase 2 of the Canal and Creek System Master Plan
- Enhance water access by providing trailhead amenities such as restrooms, kayak racks, and lockers
- Promote water sports clubs, regattas, and demonstration programs for fishing, kayaking, and other water sports
- Expand the Marina Park boat ramp if demand increases
- Monitor adjacent properties for opportunities to expand Marina Park, including acquisition of the existing AmVets site if it becomes available

### 3.8 Operations and Maintenance

The City's parks and recreation vision also includes parks operations, management, maintenance, and recreation programming recommendations. With the addition of potential new facilities and programs, there will need to be an increase in operations

and maintenance funding. This will primarily be for personnel but will also need to include maintenance supplies, equipment, and contract services.

#### 3.8.1 Operations and Maintenance Vision Recommendations

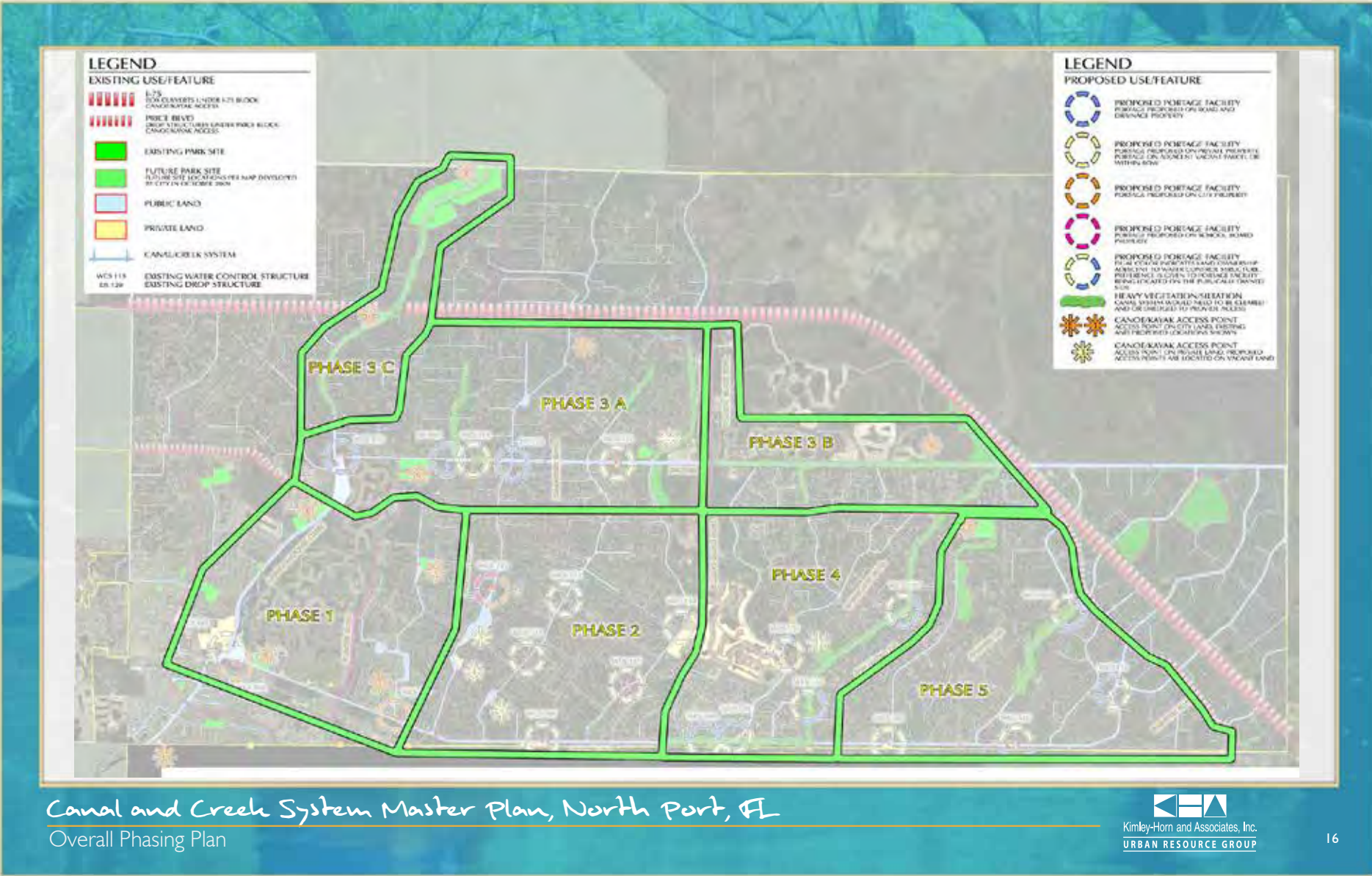
If City leaders would like to continue to attract people to the City of North Port for events and eco-tourism, the overall level and quality of maintenance in parks will need to increase. This will require a long range, comprehensive, maintenance management plan to be developed that places parks and facilities into

3 to 6 different levels of maintenance. Specific maintenance standards will need to be developed for each level and a method to measure actual maintenance time and materials will have to be implemented. Ultimately, maintenance costs will need to continue to be tracked by park or facility as well as by task (mowing, irrigation, etc.). In addition the budget for property maintenance should be broken down into smaller sub budgets by park areas and facilities. A key aspect of the

**Figure 3.7a Proposed Family Aquatic Center at Butler Park (2017)**



Figure 3.7b Canal and Creek System Master Plan Phases





maintenance management plan should be the development of a detailed preventative maintenance plan for each park or facility. While there is an existing PM schedule, this effort should go beyond this level.

In order to support an increase in the level of maintenance for existing parks and recreation facilities, as well as adding new trails, greenways, and park amenities, an additional three to four maintenance staff (Groundskeeper I and II) will likely be needed. This is reinforced by Figure 3.8a, also discussed in Chapter 2.0 - Needs + Priorities Assessment, that indicates that North Port maintains more acreage per Full Time Employee (FTE) than the national median benchmark (14.5 compared to 12.8). Furthermore, the operating budget per acre is lower than the national median benchmark (\$7,173 compared to \$8,884) as shown in Figure 3.8b. This increase in staffing level will also be necessary to support the large number of permitted events that take place in the community. In addition, there will need to be an increase in supplies and contract services.

Currently there are up to five organizations that are involved in some way in the maintenance of parks and recreation facilities. Within the City there is Property

**Figure 3.7c Existing Dallas White Park YMCA Pool**



**Figure 3.7d Canoe and Kayak Wash Area in McKibben Park**





Maintenance, Parks and Recreation and Public Works and outside there is Sarasota County and contractors. This makes it difficult to have efficient and effective maintenance of parks and recreation facilities. A goal should be to reduce this number to no more than three entities.

As additional parks and recreation facilities are developed in the east and south portions of the community, a second maintenance yard will likely be required to reduce travel time for staff and place maintenance equipment closer to the areas being maintained.

For any large, regionally focused, sports field complex that might be developed in North Port in the future, maintenance should remain the responsibility of the County.

### 3.8.2 Recreation Programming and Facility Operations

Limited staffing impacts the ability of recreation programming to grow as well as the effective management and operations of recreation facilities. The addition of one to two Recreation Program Coordinator positions will be necessary to increase future programming and support facility management. A greater utilization of full-time staff for program instruction and facility supervision should also be a goal of the department. Achieving this will provide greater staff continuity and flexibility. This should be accomplished by converting two of the existing part-time positions to full-time status. The use of volunteers to augment staff needs to be encouraged as well.

Parks and Recreation should explore the possibility of taking over management and

operations of the Community Education Center (North Port Senior Center). Parks and Recreation should also look to explore utilizing school facilities as secondary sites for recreation programming. This will help with the expansion of programming and allow services to be delivered to areas not served by the existing recreation centers.

The Parks and Recreation Division needs to develop a well-defined program plan that focuses on future directions for programming. Determining the core program areas will be critical and should include youth and seniors. Additionally, the Parks and Recreation operating budget should be broken down into smaller budgets for each major program area and recreation facility. Concurrently, the City needs to establish a comprehensive fee philosophy and policy to guide fee setting. A goal over the next 10 years should be to increase the overall cost recovery rate to above 25 percent.

The City should also establish comprehensive operating policies and procedures for each facility, program area and maintenance tasks. This should include an updated emergency action plan.

**Figure 3.8a: 2014 City of North Port Parks and Recreation Division Budget Benchmark to National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) PRORAGIS National City Benchmark Budget Data**

	City of North Port*	National Benchmarks <sup>1</sup>		
		Lower Quartile	Median	Upper Quartile
Acres of land maintained and managed*	581*	-	-	-
Full Time Equivalent (FTE) positions	33.5	-	-	-
Acres of land maintained and managed per FTE	17.34	5.4	12.8	24.1

\*Source: City of North Port Parks and Recreation Division, 2015

<sup>1</sup>Source: National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) PRORAGIS Field Report, 2015

\*Through an Interlocal Agreement, Sarasota County manages and maintains 243 acres of City of North Port Parks.

**Figure 3.8b: 2014 City of North Port Parks and Recreation Division Budget Benchmark to National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) PRORAGIS National City Benchmark Budget Data**

	City of North Port <sup>1</sup>	National Benchmarks <sup>2</sup>		
		Lower Quartile	Median	Upper Quartile
Acres Managed and Maintained*	581*	-	-	-
Department Operating Budget	\$3,479,223	-	-	-
Operating Budget Per Acre	\$5,988.34	\$4,163	\$8,884	\$17,597

\*Source: U.S. Census, 2014

<sup>1</sup>Source: City of North Port Parks and Recreation Division, 2015

<sup>2</sup>Source: National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) PRORAGIS Field Report, 2015.

\*Through an Interlocal Agreement, Sarasota County manages and maintains 243 acres of City of North Port Parks.



4.0



# Implementation Strategy



As discussed in the Visioning chapter, it is anticipated that project funding will be determined annually, based on Commission priorities. Potential funding sources may include, but not be limited to ad valorem taxes, county surtax, bonds, special assessments, impact fees, user fees, grants, donations, public-private partnerships and/or other sources. Figure 4.0a provides estimated project costs related to the 2016 Needs Assessment & Vision

## 4.1 Proposed Improvements

Figure 4.0a includes a list of proposed improvements and priorities from the Needs Assessment and Vision, 2017 Strategic Plan, and Capital Improvement Program along with outstanding recommendations from the 2006 Parks & Recreation Master Plan. Prior to establishing actual construction budgets for any of these projects, the City should first conduct preliminary design studies to determine estimated costs based on actual site conditions, infrastructure requirements, and quantity calculations.





## Proposed Improvements-2016 Needs Assessment & Vision

Figure 4.0a Vision Costs

Trails, Connectivity		Quantity	Unit	Unit Cost	Total Costs
1	Develop a walking, hiking path from Butler Park to Paw Park along city owned easement.	1	LS	\$550,684.00	\$550,684.00
2	Develop Trail head parking and Skate Park parking at the skate park.	1	LS	\$180,000.00	\$180,000.00
3	Provide more walking bridges over the waterways and canals	1	LS	\$340,000.00	\$340,000.00
4	Provide exercise areas along the Sumter Boulevard linear park.	1	LS	\$16,443.00	\$16,443.00
5	Develop walking, hiking path from Butler Park to connect to the Sarasota South Powerline Trail	1	LS	\$1,845,690.00	\$1,845,690.00
6	Legacy Trail Connection from Myakkahatchee Creek west to city limits along West Price Boulevard.	1	LS	\$5,491,530.00	\$5,491,530.00
<b>Total</b>					<b>\$8,424,347.00</b>
Water Access		Quantity	Unit	Unit Cost	Total Costs
7	Develop two additional trailhead parking areas along the Myakkahatchee Creek.	2	LS	\$50,000.00	\$100,000.00
8	Develop a mile marker system with regulatory signage to be implemented along the Myakkahatchee Creek from Butler Park (Price)	1	Mile	\$12,500.00	\$12,500.00
9	Clear invasive plants along the water way from Butler Park (Price) to the Paw Park (Appomattox) for kayaking.	1	LS	\$844,800.00	\$844,800.00
10	Canal Creek Master Plan Phase 2	1	LS	\$503,125.00	\$503,125.00
11	Canal Creek Master Plan Phase 3	1	LS	\$1,455,785.00	\$1,455,785.00
<b>Total</b>					<b>\$2,916,210.00</b>



## Proposed Improvements-2016 Needs Assessment & Vision continued

Figure 4.0a Vision Costs Continued

Placemaking and Park Improvements		Quantity	Unit	Unit Cost	Total Costs
12	Dallas White Park : Expand parking near YMCA and implement trails along canal edge	1	LS	\$879,000.00	\$879,000.00
13	Garden of the Five Senses: Nature Center and large capacity pavilion (100-150 people) in the wooded area of the Garden of the Five Senses with additional parking from Avanti Circle	1	LS	\$1,250,000.00	\$1,250,000.00
14	City Center Green: Pipe the two swales running along the city center green to improve access and reduce risk of falling	1	LS	\$69,098.00	\$69,098.40
15	Warm Mineral Springs: Conduct a Market Study and Master Plan, including a separate strategy for the adjacent 62 acres	1	LS	\$150,000.00	\$150,000.00
16	Blue Ridge Park: Develop additional parking	1	LS	\$12,300.00	\$12,300.00
17	Veteran's Park: Install chess/checker boards and reading area	5	LS	\$5,000.00	\$25,000.00
18	General: Continue to add seating, shade (all parks), trash receptacles, drinking fountains, sidewalk connections, fitness/exercise stations, and basketball courts	1	LS	\$1,300,000.00	\$1,300,000.00
19	Dog Parks: Develop a second dog park	1	LS	\$250,000.00	\$250,000.00
<b>Total</b>					<b>\$3,935,398.00</b>
Aquatics Facility		Quantity	Unit	Unit Cost	Total Costs
20	Design and construct Family Aquatic Center at Butler Park	1	-	\$12,000,000.00	\$12,000,000.00
<b>Total</b>					<b>-</b>
<b>Vision Grand Total</b>					<b>\$27,275,955.00</b>



## Proposed Improvements-2016 Needs Assessment & Vision

Figure 4.1a Proposed Improvements - 2016 Needs Assessment & Vision

Trails, Connectivity		Status
1	Develop a walking, hiking path from Butler Park to Paw Park along city owned easement.	2013 design plans and permits to be updated
2	Develop Trail head parking and Skate Park parking at the skate park.	Design complete. Seeking alternative funding sources for construction
3	Provide more walking bridges over the waterways and canals	Future capital project
4	Provide exercise areas along the Sumter Boulevard linear park.	Future capital project
5	Develop walking, hiking path from Butler Park to connect to the Sarasota South Powerline Trail	Future capital project
6	Legacy Trail Connection from Myakkahatchee Creek west to city limits along West Price Boulevard.	Future capital project
Water Access		
7	Develop two additional trailhead parking areas along the Myakkahatchee Creek.	Design budgeted in 16/17. On hold.
8	Develop a mile marker system with regulatory signage to be implemented along the Myakkahatchee Creek from Butler Park (Price)	Future capital project
9	Clear invasive plants along the water way from Butler Park (Price) to the Paw Park (Appomattox) for kayaking.	Future capital project
10	Canal Creek Master Plan Phase 2	Future capital project
11	Canal Creek Master Plan Phase 3	Future capital project
Placemaking and Park Improvements		
12	Dallas White Park : Expand parking near YMCA and implement trails along canal edge.	Future capital project
13	Garden of the Five Senses: Nature Center and large capacity pavilion (100-150 people) in the wooded area of the Garden of the Five Senses with additional parking from Avanti Circle.	Future capital project
14	City Center Green: Pipe the two swales running along the city center green to improve access and reduce risk of falling; redesign the front circle sidewalks at city hall to meet handicap accessibility	Front circle sidewalks accessibility complete. Piping of swales on hold
15	Warm Mineral Springs: Conduct a Market Study and Master Plan, including a separate strategy for the adjacent 62 acres; provide City sewer and water; construct new bathrooms; County to refurbish Three Graces fountain on 41; (parking lot improvements completed)	Parking lot improvement complete. Master Plan RFP process
16	Blue Ridge Park: Develop additional parking	Design complete. Seeking additional funding
17	Veteran's Park: Install chess/checker boards and reading area	Chess tables installed. Reading area on hold
18	Pine Park: Complete the sidewalk and lighting currently designed and engineered	Lighting complete. Installation of pathway scheduled January 2018
19	General: Continue to add seating, shade (all parks), trash receptacles, drinking fountains, sidewalk connections, fitness/exercise stations, and basketball courts	Ongoing
20	Dog Parks: Develop a second dog park; amend city ordinances to allow dogs to be on leash at other parks.	Sixteen parks are now dog-friendly. Location for second park TBD



## Proposed Improvements-2016 Needs Assessment & Vision continued

**Figure 4.1a Proposed Improvements - Needs Assessment & Vision continued**

<b>Aquatics Facility</b>		
21	Design and construct Family Aquatic Center at Butler Park	Design 95% complete as of December 2017. Staff Development Review

**Figure 4.1b Proposed Improvements - 2017 Strategic Plan**

1	North Port Aquatic Center	See figure 4.1a, item #21
2	Warm Mineral Springs	See figure 4.1a, item #15
3	Trail Development	See figure 4.1a, item #1, 5, 6, 12
4	Youth Sports Agreement	Draft under review
5	Deer Prairie Creek Connector Bridge	Future capital project
6	Sidewalk Master Plan and Policy: Review/Refinement	See figure 4.1a, item #19
7	West Villages Development	Future capital project for 63 acre Park site. Braves Spring Training Stadium to open Spring 2019



Figure 4.1c Proposed Improvements - Capital Improvement Program		Status
1	Myakkahatchee Creek Greenway	See figure 4.1a, item #1
2	Butler Park Multi-Purpose Fields	Substantial completion; close out
3	Myakkahatchee Creek Land Acquisition	440 of 490 properties purchased. Remainder submitted to Sarasota County Environmentally Sensitive Lands program
4	Blueways/Greenways Access	See figure 4.1a, item #2, 7, 16
5	Boundless Playground	Revised conceptual plan presented. Staff to bring back requested changes
6	City Center Improvements	See figure 4.1a, item #14
7	Community Education Center Parking Improvements	Design complete. Seeking additional funding
8	Disc Golf Course	Commission to approve proposed locations
9	Environmental Park Improvements	Footbridge replacement complete. Restroom pending access to City water & sewer
10	Butler Park Family Aquatic Center	See figure 4.1a, item #21
11	Park Amenities	See figure 4.1a, item# 19. McKibben sidewalk connection, bench swings, dog friendly park signs complete. See figure 4.1a, item #8, 17
12	Pine Park Sidewalks & Lighting	See figure 4.1a, item #18
13	Blue Ridge Park Playground	Neighborhood survey to be distributed
14	Butler Park Field Lighting	Budgeted in 17-18
15	Deer Prairie Creek Connector Bridge	Joint agreement with SWFWMD and Sarasota County needed
16	Dallas White Park Pool Closure	Pending closure of pool
17	Dallas White Park Dock Improvements	Securing quotes
18	Restrooms along Blueways/Greenways	Future capital project
19	Boca Chica Neighborhood Park	Neighborhood survey complete. Future capital project
20	Langlais Park Development	Future capital project
21	Warm Mineral Springs Conceptual Master Plan	See figure 4.1a, item #15
22	Warm Mineral Springs Building Rehabilitation	See figure 4.1a, item #15
23	Warm Mineral Springs Potable Water Connectivity	See figure 4.1a, item #15

Figure 4.1d Proposed Improvements - 2006 Parks & Recreation Master Plan		Status
1	Additional parkland acquisition and development for Neighborhood/Community parks	See figure 4.1c, item #3,19, 20
2	Youth Athletic Fields/Courts	See figure 4.1c, item #2, 14
3	Youth/Teen Center & Gymnasium	Morgan Family Community Center opened in 2011
4	Improved Streets, Bike Paths, Trails and Shaded Sidewalks	See figure 4.1a, item #1, 5, 6, 8, 12
5	Dog Park	Canine Club opened in 2010. See figure 4.1a, item #20
6	Nature & Environmental Facilities or Trails	Garden of Five Senses opened in 2008. See figure 4.1a, item #1, 5, 6, 13.
7	Canoeing or Kayaking Launch or Trails	Canal & Creek Master Plan completed 2010. Phase 1 Blueways completed
8	Playgrounds/Tot Lots	Added playground at Mullen (2012) & Atwater (2015). Playground. Replacement ongoing. See figure 4.1c, item #5, 13
9	Swimming Pool/Aquatics Center	See figure 4.1a, item #21
10	Special Events Area/Outdoor Amphitheater	See figure 4.1a, item# 14
11	Renovate existing neighborhood & community parks to consistent standard	See figure 4.1a, item #19
12	Regional Park - Sarasota County	
13	Civic Gathering Space at North Port Municipal Complex	See figure 4.1a, item #14
14	Conservation Area at Little Salt Springs	
15	Trails, Greenways and Blueways	See figure 4.1a, item #1, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11
16	Sidewalks & Bikeways	See figure 4.1a, item #18, 19







# City of North Port Parks + Recreation Master Plan