9 Parks, Recreation & Open Space

This chapter describes principles and strategies for acquiring and managing parks, recreation and activity centers, open space, greenways, and other recreational facilities in the community.

Introduction

The Lincoln Parks and Recreation Department is the primary public sector provider of recreational services to city residents. The Department manages 146 different sites on 5,974 acres of parks and open space land. The principles and strategies in this chapter will help guide the further enhancement of Regional, Community, and Neighborhood Parks, Community and Recreation Centers, swimming pools, an ice center, open space and greenway linkages, and the urban forest.

Guiding Principles

Parks and open space enhance the quality of life of the community's residents and are central to the community's economic development strategy—the community's ability to attract and retain viable businesses, industries, and employees is directly linked to quality of life issues, including indoor and outdoor recreational opportunities.

Signature landscapes are defined as those areas and natural features that are unique to Lincoln and Lancaster County and contribute to the identity of the community; acquisition and development of parks and open space areas should conserve and enhance these areas and features.

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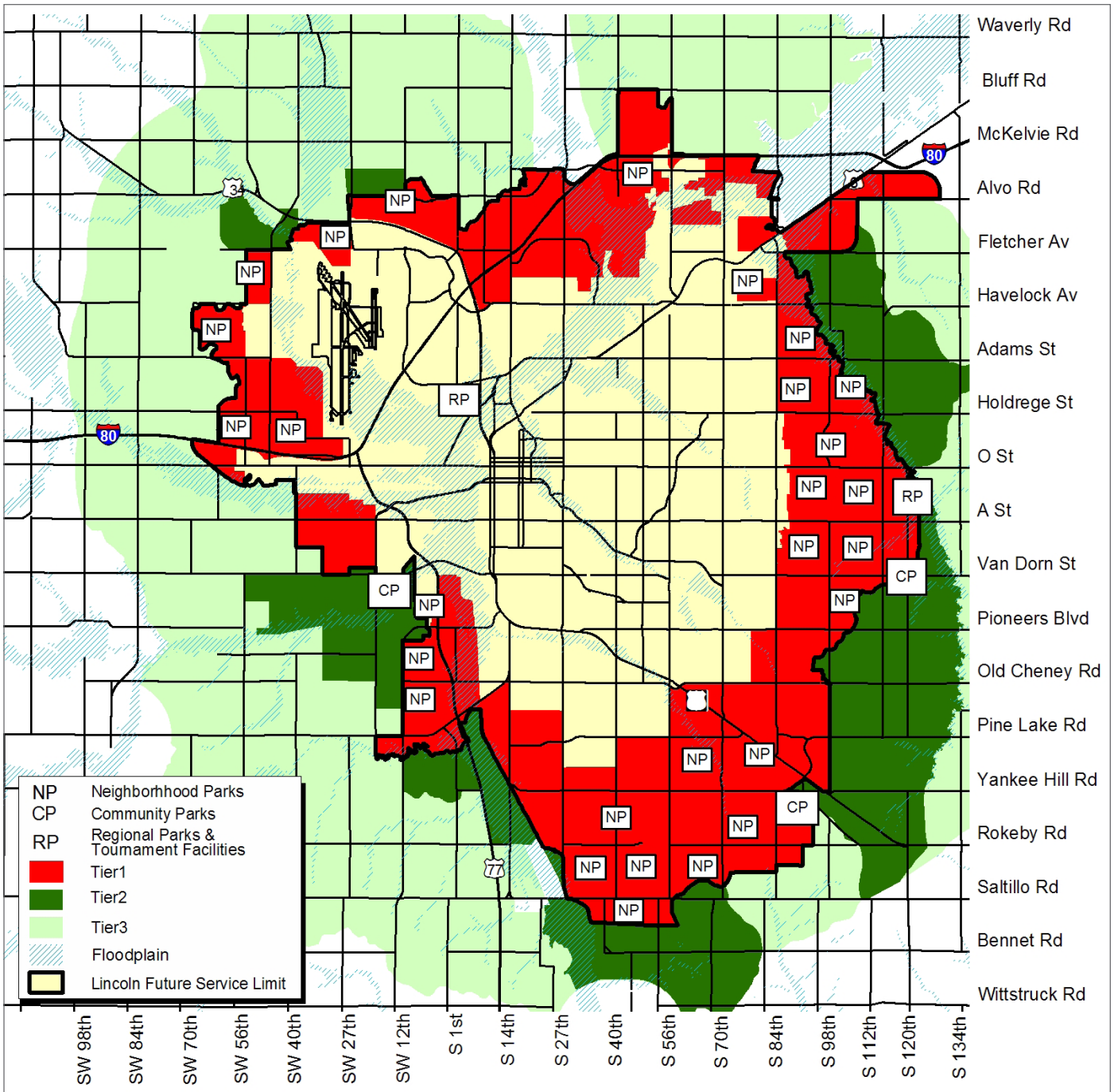
It is important that the community continue to acquire parkland and conserve open space areas commensurate with expanding development and population growth, with the responsibilities for acquisition and development of parkland and conservation of open space shared among many cooperating partner agencies and organizations.

Comprehensive and adaptive urban forestry management approaches should be applied to sustain the city's urban forest; it is essential that adequate human and financial resources be allocated and specifically dedicated to sustaining our community's expanding public green



Future parks are not site specific.

Map 9.1: Future Park Sites

infrastructure in conjunction with increasing development and population growth.

Public and private partnerships are important in the development of recreational opportunities and the preservation of environmental resources that bring a high quality of life to the City and County.

Regional Parks & Tournament Sports Facilities

Description

Regional Parks and Tournament Sports Facilities are tracts of land that encompass special or unique facilities and features that are of interest to diverse groups throughout the community. Regional Parks primarily provide opportunities for day use activities that may include community festival/ gathering spaces, picnicking, hiking, sports, fishing, canoeing, boating, and environmental interpretation/appreciation. Fields and courts for organized sports activities may be secondary or primary uses. One new Regional Park is anticipated for the Stevens Creek area during the plan period; one new Tournament Sports Facility is anticipated as an upgrade to the existing Oak Lake Park.

Level of Service

The current citywide Level of Service (LOS) is 2.5 acres of Regional Park land per 1,000 Lincoln residents. No set LOS goal is stated in LPlan 2040 since the size may vary depending on the feature or facility. In addition, Regional Parks may attract visitors from outside the immediate area and thus do not have a defined service area.

Strategies for Regional Parks & Tournament Facilities

- The City should work with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and the Lower Platte South Natural Resources District (NRD) to provide recreation facilities around the Salt Valley Lakes and other natural resource sites.
- Anticipate the transition of sites from management by the Lower Platte South Natural Resources District to the City as surrounding areas urbanize.

- Provide trail access over time to the Salt Valley Lakes and other natural resources via connections to the Salt Valley Greenway and associated tributary stream corridors.
- Continue to enhance opportunities for interpretation of native landscapes and ecosystems indigenous to eastern Nebraska through acquisition of additional parcels for buffering and enhancement of visitor facilities at the Pioneers Park Nature Center.
- Formalize a strategy for the development, marketing, and management of a tournament sports complex at Oak Lake Park.
- Explore opportunities to provide enhanced water recreation activities at Holmes Lake in Holmes Park.

- Continue to develop a cooperative relationship with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and the Lower Platte South Natural Resource District to provide recreation facilities within rural areas of the community.
- Identify and acquire a site of approximately 200 acres for the future development of a Regional Park in the Stevens Creek Basin. This site could potentially be co-located with a future Lincoln Public Schools high school facility.

Community Parks

Description

Community Parks are typically 30 to 50 acre sites that are readily accessible from arterial streets and the commuter/recreational trail system. Community Parks may include play fields and play courts for organized sports, a playground with an accessible fall surface, facilities for day use activities including a picnic shelter and restroom, seating, walking paths, and off-street parking. Community Parks may also include a swimming pool and/or a recreation center. Community Parks often include activity areas consistent with those located in neighborhood parks and as a result, Community Parks may serve as the Neighborhood Park for surrounding residential areas. LPlan 2040 recognizes the need for about 150 acres of new Community Park land. Three new Community Park sites are anticipated.

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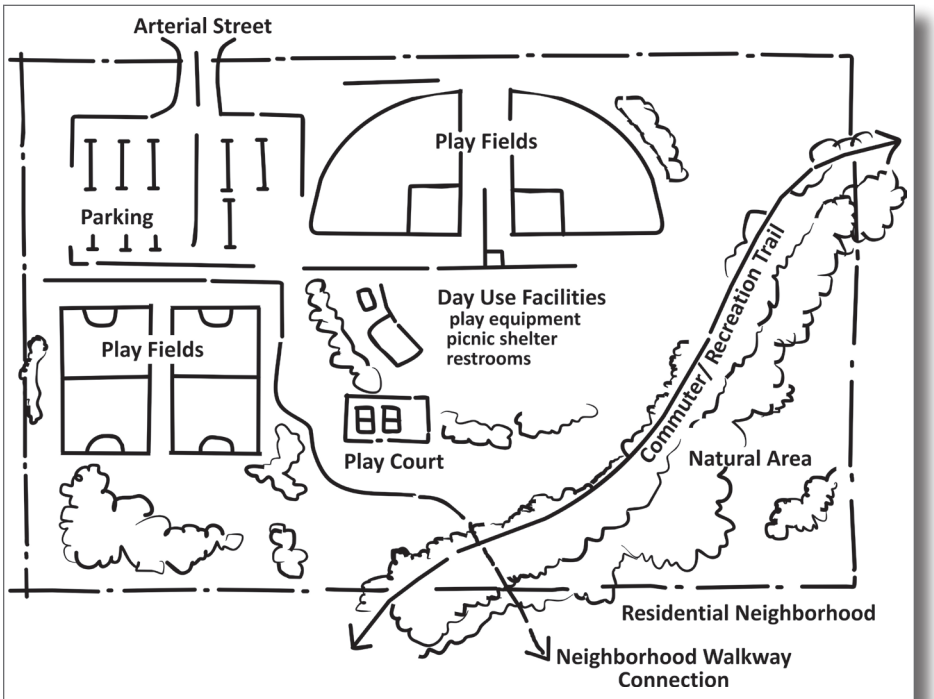

Figure 9.1: Community Park Diagram

Level of Service

The level of service (LOS) goal for Community Parks is based on both the financial resources anticipated to be available for park development and programmatic objectives. It is anticipated that development of future Community Parks will be financed primarily through voter-approved general obligation bonds. There are currently 18 Community Parks encompassing roughly 746 acres, with an average size of 41 acres. The current citywide LOS is 2.9 acres of Community Park land per 1,000 Lincoln residents. This LOS is calculated by dividing the total acres in such parks by the city's total population in thousands. LPlan 2040 establishes an LOS goal of 1.3 acres per 1,000 new Lincoln residents in new growth areas and a service area radius of approximately 2 miles in the urban area. Given the new Community Parks developed in growth areas, the city-wide measure by the end of the plan period, 2040, is projected to be 2.4 acres of Community Park land per 1,000 Lincoln residents. While this goal is lower than the current LOS, it recognizes the financial resources projected to be available and plans for the development of three 50-acre sites during the planning period of a size that will meet the programmatic objectives for Community Parks.

Strategies for Community Parks

- Locate Community Parks on a collector or arterial street to accommodate automobile access and parking; park sites should also be readily accessible by pedestrians and bicyclists from a commuter/ recreation trail.
- Locate Community Parks adjacent to middle schools where possible.
- Community Parks should be adjacent to greenway linkages.

- Provide buffering between Community Park activities and adjacent residential areas to minimize traffic and noise impacts.
- Enact design standards for field and parking lot lighting that seek to minimize glare, light spill-over onto adjacent properties, and impacts on the dark night sky.
- Select sites for Community Parks that allow for multiple functions, such as stormwater management or habitat conservation.
- Focus on the development and maintenance of sports fields and associated day use facilities.
- Establish Youth Baseball/Softball complexes as part of Community Parks throughout the city; form partnerships with youth baseball organizations and Lincoln Public Schools for maintenance and utilization strategies.
- Create pedestrian connections between surrounding residential development and neighborhood-related park features such as playgrounds and park shelters.
- Development of Community Park sites should be accomplished through regularly scheduled "quality of life" bond issue initiatives and capital improvement program allocations.
- Develop Jensen Park, southeast of Yankee Hill Road and South 84th Street as a Community Park as funding becomes available.
- Develop Bison Park, located southeast of West Van Dorn and South Coddington Avenue as a Community Park as funding becomes available.
- Acquire and develop a Community Park in the Stevens Creek basin in the vicinity of A Street and South 120th Street as funding becomes available.

Neighborhood Parks

Description

Neighborhood parks are approximately four to six acre sites that are centrally located within areas of residential development. Typical activity areas include playground equipment, open lawn areas for informal games and activities or play courts with a single basketball goal for informal games, shaded seating, and walking paths. The "Sparks" concept envisions an expansion of the current co-location of schools and parks and sharing of some facilities.

Neighborhood parks are approximately four to six acre sites that are centrally located within areas of residential development.

Level of Service

The level of service (LOS) goal for Neighborhood Parks is based on both the financial resources anticipated to be available for park development and on programmatic objectives. It

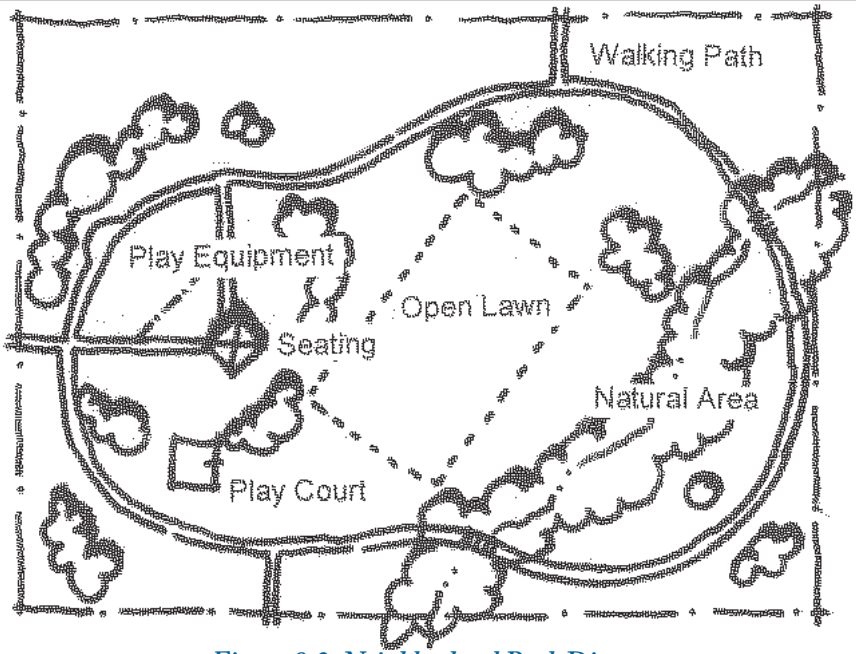

Figure 9.2: Neighborhood Park Diagram

is anticipated that development of Neighborhood Parks will be financed primarily through impact fees. There are currently 48 Neighborhood Parks encompassing roughly 353 acres, with an average size of 7.4 acres. The current citywide LOS is 1.4 acres of Neighborhood Park land per 1,000 Lincoln residents. This LOS is calculated by dividing the total acres in such parks by the city's total population in thousands. LPlan 2040 establishes an LOS goal of one acre per 1,000 new Lincoln residents in new growth areas. Neighborhood Parks should generally be located within the center of each mile section with a service area radius of approximately ½ mile in the urban area. Given the new Neighborhood Parks developed in growth areas, the city-wide measure by the end of the plan period, 2040, is projected to be 1.3 acres of Neighborhood Park land per 1,000 Lincoln residents. While this goal is slightly lower than the current LOS, it recognizes the financial resources projected to be available. Projected funding is based upon the current level of impact fees for Neighborhood Parks, which supports the acquisition and development of about four acres of Neighborhood Park land per square mile of residential development. Four acres are adequate to accommodate the programmatic objectives for a Neighborhood Park.

Strategies for Neighborhood Parks

- Locate Neighborhood Parks close to the center of residential areas and within walking distance of a majority of residents; park sites should be readily accessible by pedestrians and bicyclists.
- Develop "Sparks" such that site planning and development is coordinated, anticipating that the primary use of the Spark will be school students during the school day and related after school programming; Sparks will be available for use of neighborhood and community residents during the evening, weekend, and summer hours.
- Locate Neighborhood Parks adjacent to greenway linkages where possible.

Figure 9.3: Joint School and Park Site ("Spark") Image

- Locate park sites where residents living in surrounding homes, people in passing vehicles, or pedestrians can view activities in the park to provide for informal supervision.
- Where possible, select sites for Neighborhood Parks that allow for multiple functions, such as stormwater management or habitat conservation.
- Identify opportunities to acquire and develop Neighborhood Parks in established neighborhoods that are deficient in Neighborhood Park resources.
- Continue joint planning activities between the City of Lincoln and Lincoln Public Schools for selection and acquisition of future school/park sites.
- Establish an interlocal agreement for the development of Sparks that addresses funding for initial construction, repair and replacement, liability, play equipment inspections, mowing, and maintenance.

Community Centers, Recreation Centers & Activity Centers

Description

Public school buildings, particularly elementary schools, can serve as centers of neighborhood life if the buildings are designed to maximize flexibility and opportunities for community use during non-school hours. The addition of multi-purpose space described as an "activity center" allows for community activities such as programs for older adults during the school day, and supports youth programs before and after school.

The City of Lincoln through its Parks and Recreation Department currently operates seven facilities as recreation/community centers. Three of these facilities are co-located with schools (Belmont, Calvert, and Irving) and incorporate youth recreation programming, before and after school programming, and summer day camps. Air Park Recreation Center operates out of a former Air Force Base recreation center building, with an emphasis on youth programs at Arnold Elementary School. Therapeutic and adaptive recreation programs are a primary emphasis of programming at Easterday Recreation Center. The Ager Play Center provides facilities and activities focused primarily on pre-school children and their families. F Street Community Center provides a broad range of human service and recreation activities. The programs and facilities offered by Parks and Recreation are part of a network of recreation and human service programs offered in the community.

Level of Service

There should be a center integrated with each new elementary school and middle school. These centers should have a service area radius of approximately two miles in the urban area.

Strategies for Community Centers, Recreation Centers & Activity Centers

- An activity center should include a large multi-purpose space, public restrooms and shared office and storage space for community agencies and organizations offering programs in the center.
- Access to the activity center should be designed so that it can be restricted to the school during school hours and accessed via a separate entrance after hours.
- Activity centers should also be designed so that they can be used in combination with the school gym, media center, cafeteria and entry lobby to

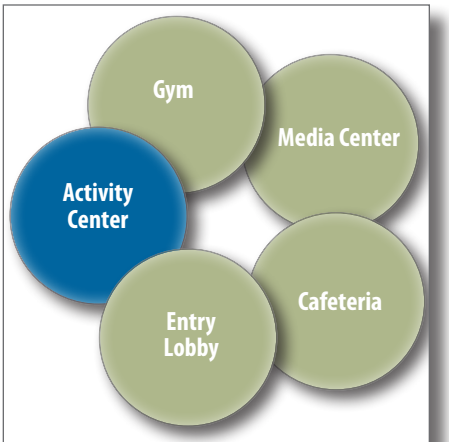

Figure 9.4: Activity Center Concept Diagram

support youth programs before and after school, as well as a variety of other community activities.

- Replace the aging Air Park Recreation Center with a new facility co-located with Arnold Elementary School, which was designed to provide for future opportunities to attach a recreation center or activity center.
- Explore opportunities to work with the Lincoln YMCA and Lincoln Public Schools to develop new community recreation center facilities in southeast and possibly northeast Lincoln similar to the school/recreation center/park model of Schoo Middle School/Fallbrook YMCA/ neighborhood park.
- Explore opportunities with Lincoln Public Schools to develop multi-purpose community space (activity centers) with new school facilities, allowing for expanded community programs and activities at school sites.

Aquatic Facilities

Description

Aquatic Facilities are developed to provide opportunities for water recreation activities. The City of Lincoln owns and manages ten Aquatic Facilities. The most recently constructed outdoor swimming pools (Highlands Pool and University Place Pool) are designed as "pool in a park" facilities. These pools feature zero depth entry, interactive water features and a deep well for diving activities. There are currently nine outdoor public pools in Lincoln, and one free-standing sprayground in Trago Park. Four of these facilities are classified as Community Pools (Highlands, Star City Shores, University Place, and Woods) and five are classified as Neighborhood Pools (Air Park, Ballard, Belmont, Eden, and Irvingdale). The City should maintain its commitment to outdoor water recreation activities; however no additional Neighborhood Pools should be constructed in the future. New Aquatic Facilities should be located and designed to serve quadrant areas of the community. New Aquatic Facilities should be readily accessible by pedestrians and bicyclists.

Level of Service

The current citywide LOS is 3.5 outdoor public pools per 100,000 Lincoln residents. The range of LOS for benchmark cities is 1.1 to 6.0 outdoor public pools per 100,000 residents, with an average LOS of 3.7 outdoor public pools per 100,000 residents. No new neighborhood pools are proposed during the planning period because of the low cost-recovery and the level of ongoing tax support required for annual operations and maintenance. Thus, the City is not intending to maintain the current LOS, but will continue to provide opportunities for aquatic recreation as described in the strategies that follow.

Strategies for Aquatic Facilities

- Continue to maintain and upgrade mechanical systems of existing outdoor swimming pools; regularly add features to Neighborhood Pools to make them inviting and attractive to visitors.
- Complete a major renovation of Star City Shores, adding new features.
- Construct a new Community Pool facility similar to Star City Shores at Mahoney Park.
- Renovate three existing Community Pools (Highlands, University Place, and Woods) over time as needed.
- Renovate the five Neighborhood Pools (Air Park, Ballard, Belmont, Eden and Irvingdale) to bring the pool basins and bathhouses into compliance with accessibility guidelines, contingent upon adequate funding for annual operations and for repair/renovation costs.

- Consider public-private partnerships with organizations such as the YMCA to provide access to outdoor pools in Lincoln that are outside of the service area of City operated pools on a non-membership, fee-for-use basis.
- Explore opportunities as they emerge to promote development of an indoor aquatics center with competition facilities as an emphasis; potential partners include UNL and one or more private partners.

Open Space and Greenway Linkages

Description

Open space and greenway linkages are a system or network of areas preserved in an undeveloped state due to unique natural attributes, such as floodplains and associated riparian areas, saline and freshwater wetlands, and native prairies. Some areas may be protected through conservation easements that allow for compatible land use activities such as row crop farming or pasturing. Fee simple title may be acquired for other areas that are best maintained in a natural state due to particularly sensitive features (e.g., rare or sensitive habitat areas), or that have value for resource-based recreation activities (e.g., hiking, interpretive activities, wildlife viewing). The local and regional commuter/recreation trail system should be integrated with the greenway linkages.

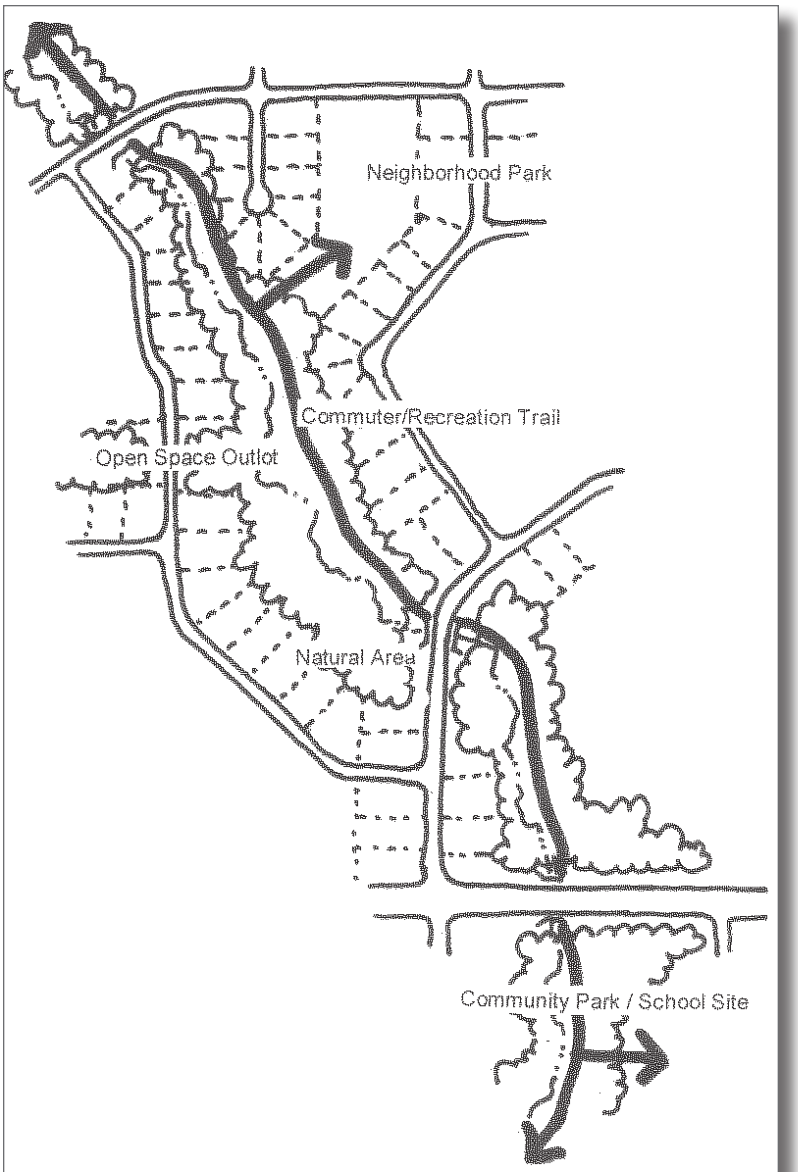

Figure 9.5: Greenway Linkages

Strategies for Open Space and Greenway Linkages

- Develop criteria and priorities to determine land areas that are most appropriately acquired and managed by a public agency.
- Implement the Salt Valley Greenway concept as identified in the *"Environmental Resources"* chapter.
- Continue the cooperative efforts of the City of Lincoln, Lancaster County, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, and the Lower Platte South Natural Resources District on various efforts including land assembly, maintenance, flood control, wildlife and habitat preservation, recreation, and game management.
- Formalize cooperative agreements between the City of Lincoln, Lancaster County and the Lower Platte South Natural Resources District regarding planning, acquisition and management of open space and greenway areas.
- Utilize a "Rain to Recreation" approach to open space and greenway linkages that is coordinated with the City's watershed management program

and the Lower Platte South Natural Resources District to reduce flood damages, protect water quality and natural areas, while providing for recreational and educational opportunities so as to realize multiple benefits.

- Establish an organizational structure for coordination of open space conservation activities between public agencies and private organizations.
- Encourage development of a private land trust organization, or expand the role of an existing organization to include land trust activities in Lancaster County.
- Identify open space areas that are particularly valued by community residents for rare or unique attributes and establish development regulations utilizing a balance of incentive and mandatory measures.
- Utilize greenway linkages for commuter/ recreation trails.
- Pursue additional strategies as identified in the *"Environmental Resources"* chapter.

Urban Forest

Description

The native landscape of the region surrounding Lincoln is tall grass prairie. Urban trees shelter homes from the elements, reduce reflective heat gain, slow down stormwater runoff, provide wildlife habitat, and stabilize the soil. It is recognized that trees, both those occurring naturally and those planted and managed, are essential to the quality of life of residents and the character of the community. Research indicates that street trees have public health and environmental benefits, enhance the values of adjoining residences and enhance the economic vitality of commercial districts.

Other Location and Design Criteria

Continue to promote planting and management of street trees along all public streets within the corporate limits, and planting and management of trees in park areas.

Strategies

- Promote a diverse mix of tree species and ages in public tree plantings.
- Systematically and proactively manage trees on public property.
- Continue to plant and replant public trees through City tax funds, grants, and public/private partnerships.
- Monitor emergent insect infestations and diseases that threaten the vitality of public trees; develop readiness plans.
- Promote public education regarding the planting and care of trees, and opportunities for volunteer involvement in planting and maintaining public trees.
- Street trees require ongoing, regular management to assure adequate clearance over sidewalks and over streets, and to maintain visibility of traffic safety signage. Increasing resources for staffing and contractual work are needed commensurate with the increasing number of street trees associated with new development in the community.
- Consider development of regulations that promote preservation of significant trees within new commercial and residential subdivisions.

Other Recreational Facilities & Activities

Indoor Ice Center

The Breslow Ice Center is proposed to be located in the West Haymarket area as part of a concentration of sporting facilities near downtown Lincoln and the University of Nebraska City Campus.

The Breslow Ice Center will be developed in phases with the initial construction to include a single ice surface, and the opportunity to add a second ice surface in the future. The facility should be operated in cooperation and coordination with the Ice Box. The Ice Box is operated by a private organization in a building on Innovation Campus through a long-term lease agreement that expires during the Plan period. As the Breslow Ice Center develops, opportunities for the integration of functions associated with the Ice Box should be explored and may include the addition of spectator seating.

Golf Courses

The Parks and Recreation Department operates five public golf courses, including Ager Junior, Highlands, Holmes, Mahoney and Pioneers. In addition, there are several private golf courses in Lincoln and Lancaster County. LPlan 2040 assumes continued operation of five public golf courses, but no additional ones.

Other Public, Semipublic, and Private Facilities

Additional recreational facilities available to local residents include those under the control of public schools, private and parochial schools, the State of Nebraska, other units of local government, and private interests. It is anticipated that fitness and wellness facilities will continue to be developed and managed by private organizations in the future. Therefore, development of new City-owned and managed recreation centers with an emphasis on fitness and wellness is not anticipated. The Lincoln YMCA has indoor recreation facilities in the downtown and three quadrants of the community – Cooper YMCA in southwest Lincoln, Fallbrook YMCA in northwest Lincoln, and Northeast Family YMCA in northeast Lincoln. The YMCA has interest in the development of a new facility in southeast Lincoln in the future, and possibly a replacement facility in northeast Lincoln.

Primary and Secondary Schools

Lincoln Public Schools, various private and parochial schools, and other school districts in Lancaster County play a key role in the overall system of recreational facilities and services. Schools are focal points for surrounding neighborhoods. School playgrounds and facilities may be the most significant recreation resource at the neighborhood level.

Universities and Colleges

Local colleges and universities also provide a wide range of participant activities and spectator sports available to both students and the community. Major sports, music, and entertainment programs often are held in facilities owned by colleges and universities.

Non-Profits/Private Organizations

There is a diverse range of facilities and programs available to community residents from privately operated fitness facilities to community centers offering human service programs operated by non-profit organizations. Programs and activities range from food distribution and adaptive recreation programs for individuals with intellectual disabilities to weight rooms and aerobics classes. The YMCA, YWCA, and other private organizations sponsor programs in swimming, athletics, arts and crafts, camping, and various club activities, and provide facilities for more casual recreational activities. Some examples of private sector recreation facilities include bowling alleys, sport courts, soccer complexes, gyms, athletic clubs and fitness facilities and privately owned golf and miniature golf courses.

Lincoln Children's Zoo

The *Lincoln Children's Zoo* is one of only five zoos in the nation dedicated to educating our youth. The Zoo's design is tailored specifically for children. The zoo is located on city-owned land near South 27th Street and A Street, but is managed by a nonprofit organization. The zoo plans to expand its facilities and attractions to the west along A Street and also has plans for additional parking south of A Street.

Lincoln Children's Museum

The *Lincoln Children's Museum* is a nonprofit organization located in Downtown. The Lincoln Children's Museum is an indoor facility that includes exhibits to encourage children and parents to learn and play together. The museum is located on city-owned land near Centennial Mall and P Street, but is managed by a nonprofit organization.

Community Gardens

Community gardens have been established at a number of privately owned locations across Lincoln. Community gardens also can be an appropriate land management approach for areas of parkland not committed to active recreation uses. The Parks and Recreation Department, working in cooperation with organizations such as Community Crops, should develop standards and procedures to support and encourage development and operation of community gardens in appropriate park and public locations.

Plant Conservatory

The City should cooperate with other organizations to explore the potential for establishing an indoor plant conservatory as a year-round attraction for visitors and local residents. A plant conservatory could include a variety of species ranging from local to exotic, and could serve a dual function as research/educational facility.

Special Purpose Facilities

The City owns and operates two special purpose facilities — the Pioneers Park Nature Center (an interpretive facility for native prairie, plants, animals and landscapes), and the Hyde Observatory near Holmes Lake. The City and Nebraska Game and Parks plans to develop Boosalis Park as a recreational shooting sports complex.

Major Spectator Event Facilities

In collaboration with the University of Nebraska and Lincoln Pro Baseball, the City of Lincoln participated in the development of Haymarket Park adjacent to Downtown's historic Haymarket District. The complex includes a 4,500 seat baseball stadium and a 750 seat softball stadium.

In collaboration with the University of Nebraska, the City of Lincoln is participating in the development of the West Haymarket Arena adjacent to Downtown's historic Haymarket District. The project includes a 16,000 seat indoor arena and adjacent plaza and public gathering areas.

Emerging Recreation Activities

It is likely that there will be a generational shift in recreation interests and activities due to increasing experience with technology as a recreational activity. The Parks and Recreation Department should monitor and be responsive to emerging interests, and seek opportunities for partnerships and collaborations with user groups to support

activities and to develop facilities. Current examples of emerging recreation activities include: Skate Parks, BMX Cycling, Cyclo-Cross, Mountain Biking, Geocaching, and Adventure Racing.

Dog Parks/Runs

The Parks and Recreation Department currently manages two dog run facilities – Rickman's Run in southeast Lincoln and the Oak Creek Dog Run in northwest Lincoln. These facilities are heavily utilized and there is regular and continuing interest in development of additional facilities for dog-related activities. The Parks and Recreation Department should develop a master plan for dog facilities. This master plan should explore the development and management of a dog run in each quadrant of the city, a dog park near downtown, operations and capital funding needs, and opportunities for partnerships for the development and management of dog facilities.

Additional County Recreation Amenities

Lancaster County accommodates many other outdoor activities including hunting, nature viewing, fishing, boating, swimming, picnicking, camping, and hiking. The *Nebraska Game and Parks Commission* manages seven State Recreation Area lakes (Bluestem, Branched Oak, Conestoga, Olive Creek, Pawnee, Stagecoach, and Wagon Train) and seven Wildlife Management Areas. In addition, the *Lower Platte South Natural Resources District* manages five public lakes (Cottontail, Merganser, Tanglewood, Wild Plum, and Wildwood) and two urban area wetlands with public access (Lincoln Saline Wetland Nature Center and Whitehead Saline Wetland. Other cities and villages in the county maintain their own public parks, recreation centers, and camping areas.