

Parks and recreation guidelines serve as a measurement tool to evaluate how well a community is meeting its desired level of service. The guidelines developed in the Sarasota County Parks and Recreation Master Plan have evolved from analyses performed in the technical background studies of this report, public input, guidance from County staff and the Steering Committee, as well as comparisons to generally accepted state and national standards. Formulating the parks and recreation guidelines involved, to a great extent, reasoned judgment that weighs needs and desires with practical implementation considerations such as current and projected funding, land availability, and other factors.

In summary, future recreation needs through 2020 focus on expanding access to Sarasota's natural areas and conservation lands, trail connectivity, beach and boating access, neighborhood parks, and large scale athletic facilities.

Park Planning

Acreage necessary to develop new parks can be obtained through purchase or through partnerships. Acquisitions can be strategically targeted sites or can be purchases of opportunity where appropriate land is or becomes available. Sites are evaluated based on constraints and opportunities. An example of a constraint would be ecologically sensitive areas requiring special protection. An example of an opportunity would be positioning a trail to provide educational opportunities adjacent to a feature of interest.

Once a site is selected or acquired, it is important to identify the acreage available for development as well as conservation. To the greatest extent possible, recreational amenities are matched to site characteristics and the adjacent neighborhood.

Typically park plans are developed in partnership with the public through a series of community workshops. Generally, the first workshop generally involves brainstorming and discussions of general goals and expectations. Following the first workshop, staff coordinates with a landscape architect to develop a draft concept plan. In some cases where grant funding is sought for land acquisition cost, a basic concept plan is developed in advance of community input. Once a draft concept plan is developed, one or more public workshops are held to address issues, concerns and other opportunities. Prior to bringing the concept plan to the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC), the plan is reviewed by the Parks Advisory Recreation Council (PARC). Upon approval of the concept plan by the BOCC, staff moves forward to obtain detailed plans, permits and construction specifications.

It is common for park development projects to have partners either within or outside Sarasota County Government. Examples include Sarasota County School Board and the YMCA. Recent examples of internal business center partnerships include the development of the Red Bug Slough Preserve in cooperation with Natural Resources and the Celery Fields in cooperation with Water Resources.