

## **PARKS AND RECREATION**

### **INTRODUCTION**

An integrated park system in Fairfax County is nationally recognized for its quality and diversity of park resources. Within the context of the Comprehensive Plan, these parklands and recreational facilities play a key role in shaping both the landscape and the quality of life through the conservation of natural and cultural resources, protection of environmental quality, provision of public facilities and human services, and management of urban growth.

The integrated park system is administered by nine public agencies at the local, regional, state and federal levels of government. Since its inception, this long-established integrated parks system has evolved into a diversified mosaic of public open space and recreation facilities, ranging from smaller local parks to extensive, regionally significant land holdings. Together, these public lands account for nearly 20 percent of the County's total land area. (See Figure 1.) Privately managed open space, lands and facilities provide additional components of the open space and recreation system serving County residents.

The integrated park system serves as the primary public mechanism for accomplishing two equally important purposes: (1) to protect and preserve environmentally sensitive land, habitat connectivity, and water resources, and areas of archaeological, historical and/or cultural significance; and (2) to provide opportunities for residents, workers and visitors to pursue leisure activities in safe, accessible, and enjoyable parks and community recreational facilities.

Pressures of population growth, changing land use patterns and life styles, and fiscal realities will continue to influence the County's plans and abilities to provide park and recreation services at levels consistent with public needs. The pace of urban development is rapidly foreclosing the availability of land suitable for future parks, while escalating land costs further constrain opportunities for purchase of public parklands.

Additionally, development impacts on park and recreation resources are pervasive and growing. These impacts include placement of road improvements and utility and storm water management facilities or outflow on, or adjacent to, parklands; degradation of streams through siltation and erosion; loss of buffer areas and tree cover; fragmentation of wildlife habitats; and impacts on cultural resources. Park operations may adversely impact surrounding neighborhoods. Park providers should guard against negative neighborhood impacts through careful park planning, site design, management and operations.

A large portion of parkland, that includes a part of the Countywide trail system, is collocated within Environmental Quality Corridors (EQC's) establishing an integrated network of stream valleys and associated lands. The purpose of this network is to conserve open space; protect wildlife habitat, biodiversity of species, riparian corridors, water quality and aesthetic values; control flooding and erosion; and provide continuity of non-motorized access between parklands, residential communities, employment and commercial centers and transit areas. The public park system is challenged, now and in the future, with completing the network by acquiring linking lands and public access, and connecting, building and maintaining a continuous network.

Increased use of recreation facilities results in faster facility deterioration and replacement rates, potential crowding, and user conflicts. As residential densities rise and individual yards

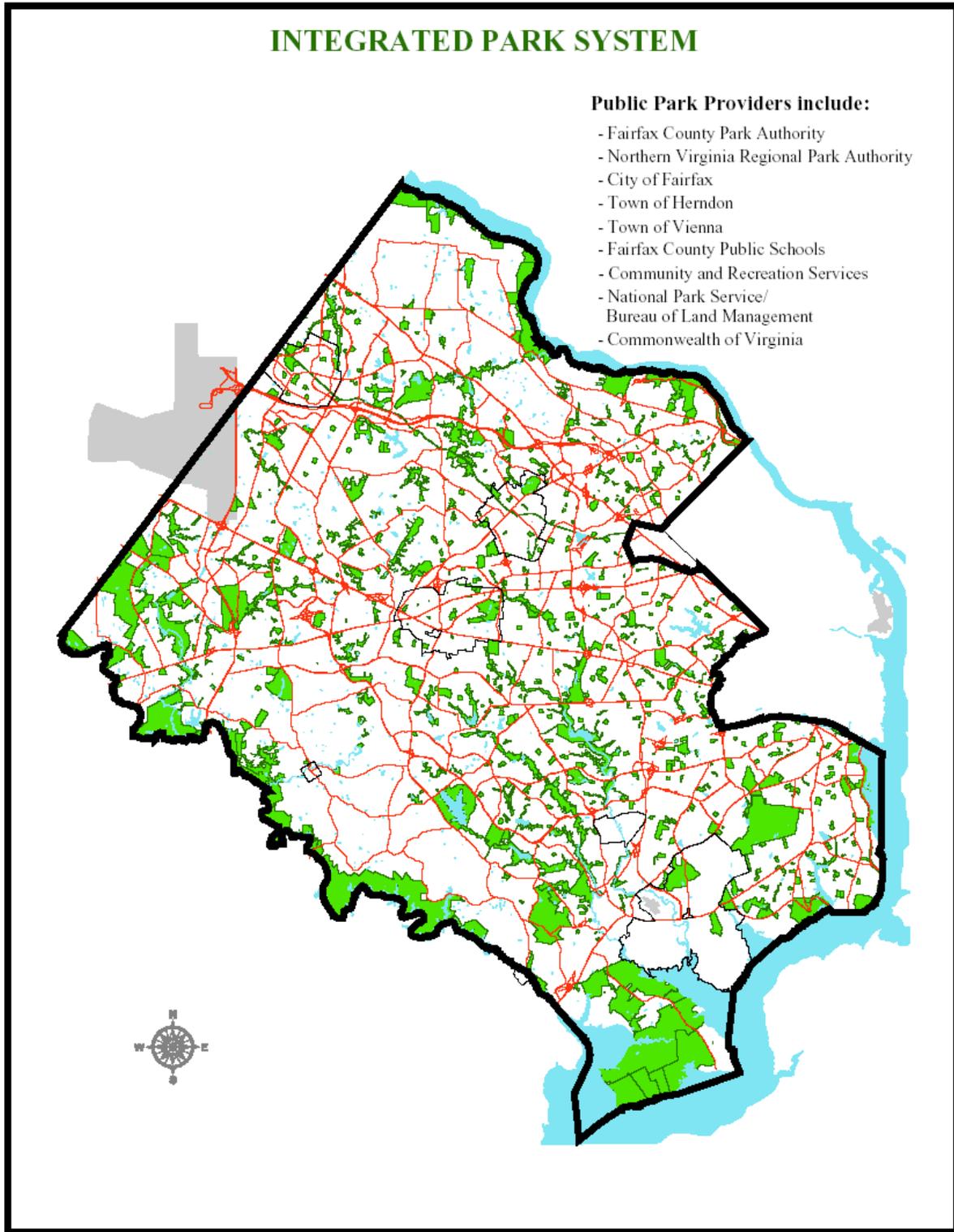


FIGURE 1

become smaller or disappear, the need for public open space, woodlands, trails and open play areas increases.

Over the next 20 years, opportunities to develop private and public urban-scale parks as part of mixed use developments should be planned and promoted in appropriate areas of the County. This type of urban open space will be an important element in providing relief from urban congestion.

These concerns necessitate a comprehensive approach to planning and acquisition for an integrated system of parks, recreation, and open space, which utilizes the resources of the public and private sectors to maximum advantage. It is critical that public and private park providers throughout the Northern Virginia region assess current and long range park and leisure needs and coordinate the effective delivery of park and recreation services while protecting significant natural and cultural resources. It is in the best public interest to ensure the efficient use and equitable distribution of resources and services throughout the community to meet the dual goals for protection of significant natural and cultural resources, and provision of sustainable parklands and facilities that serve the increasing demands for a full range of park experiences.

Public policy, regulations, actions and funding influence the private sector's role and responsibility for land stewardship and provision of recreation resources. Collaborative-efforts between the private and public sectors, especially through the land development process, can result in better appreciation, protection, and stewardship of natural and cultural resources, as well as the provision of adequate recreational facilities and amenities to serve residents.

Park planning and land use decisions should be guided by the County goals cited below:

## **BOARD OF SUPERVISORS GOALS**

**Environmental Protection** - The amount and distribution of population density and land uses in Fairfax County should be consistent with environmental constraints inherent in the need to preserve natural resources and to meet or exceed federal, state and local standards for water quality, ambient air quality and other environmental standards. Development in Fairfax County should be sensitive to the natural setting, in order to prevent degradation of the County's natural environment.

**Growth and Adequate Public Facilities** - Growth in Fairfax County should be held to a level consistent with available, accessible, and adequate public facilities as well as with rational plans to provide new public facilities to maintain existing public facilities. The County's plans for development should take into account financial limitations associated with increased needs for public facilities.

**Culture and Recreation** - Fairfax County should provide local systems and participate in regional programs for safe, accessible and enjoyable parks (including active, passive, and historical parks); recreational programs; libraries; and cultural programs and facilities. Fairfax County should also support and encourage the identification and preservation of its heritage resources for the aesthetic, social and educational benefits of present and future citizens.

**Open Space** - Fairfax County should support the conservation of appropriate land areas in a natural state to preserve, protect and enhance stream valleys, meadows, woodlands, wetlands, farmland, and plant and animal life. Small areas of open space should also be preserved in already congested and developed areas for passive neighborhood uses, visual relief, scenic value, and screening and buffering purposes.

- Objective 1: Identify and serve current and future park and recreation needs through an integrated park system that provides open space, recreational services and facilities, and stewardship of natural and cultural resources.**
- Policy a: Plan, acquire, develop, and maintain the following types of parks through the Fairfax County Park Authority in conjunction with other public providers and the private sector and in accordance with the Park Classification System as follows: (See Parks and Recreation Appendix 1 for the Park Classification System):
- A. Local Parks
  - B. District Parks
  - C. Countywide Parks
  - D. Resource-Based Parks
  - E. Regional Parks
- Policy b: Provide a balance of quality recreation opportunities with the protection and preservation of natural and cultural resources.
- Policy c: Ensure the provision of parklands and the efficient use of facilities throughout the County is based on user needs and consistent with population distribution and growth patterns.
- Policy d: Use the Standards and Criteria for Establishment of Park and Recreation Facilities (Appendix 2) as a guide for the planning and provision of parkland and recreation facilities to adequately serve the County's current and projected population.
- Policy e: Enhance existing park experiences and resource protection opportunities through acquisition of lands adjacent to existing parkland, wherever feasible.
- Policy f: Extend public investments in parkland acquisition and park development through a combination of public/private mechanisms, such as voluntary dedication and/or donation of land, fee simple purchase, negotiated agreements, and other appropriate means.
- Policy g: Land acquisition for public park use should be guided by the Parkland Acquisition Criteria included in the Standards and Criteria for Establishment of Park and Recreation Facilities (Appendix 2) to adequately serve the County's current and projected population. Potential public parkland need not require a specific "public park" Area Plan land use designation in order to be acquired or used as a public park.
- Policy h: Encourage private landowners to preserve open space and protect ecological and cultural resources through the use of conservation easements, land use valuation, and other land use options, incentives and programs.
- Policy i: Acquire those Environmental Quality Corridors (EQC) segments needed to connect and complete the public stream valley network and trail systems. Where land acquisition may not be feasible or desirable, work to obtain use of privately-owned resources through voluntary means such as conservation easements and cooperative agreements.

Policy j: Endorse the efforts of the multi-jurisdictional Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority (NVRPA) to fulfill its purpose: to carry out a long-range open space plan for Northern Virginia, through a cooperative system of regional parks, to supplement and enhance local park systems in Northern Virginia.

Policy k: Coordinate and cooperate with other County, municipal, regional, state and federal agencies in planning, development, protection and management of all park resources to support the integrated park system.

Policy l: Work cooperatively with private and public landowners to develop and provide trail connections to parkland from existing and planned trails and encourage non-motorized access to parks.

**Objective 2: Protect appropriate land areas in a natural state to ensure preservation of significant and sensitive natural resources.**

Policy a: Identify and acquire lands with significant natural resources including exemplary natural areas, natural areas in highly developed areas, large natural areas, areas connected to other protected lands and stream valleys.

Policy b: Manage and protect significant natural resources throughout the County, in cooperation with other agencies, organizations and partners, by implementing ecosystem management principles, restoring degraded natural resources, linking major resource areas and supporting habitats essential to biological diversity, where possible.

Policy c: Manage vegetative resources, including invasive species, through appropriate inventories, monitoring, education, planning, management and restoration to protect and improve the ecosystem function including increasing native species biodiversity.

Policy d: Protect, monitor, plan, manage and restore wildlife, and wildlife habitat, on parkland to protect the ecosystem function, including increasing biodiversity of native species.

Policy e: Protect, monitor and manage park water resources and stream valleys.

Policy f: Implement best management practices and policies on parkland, as recommended in adopted County policies, objectives, watershed plans, and the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance.

Policy g: Protect parklands from encroachments and minimize adverse human impacts to natural areas.

Policy h: Minimize adverse impacts to air quality resulting from park operations and maintenance.

Policy i: Encourage natural resource stewardship through educational programs and other means that highlight the significance of natural resources.

Policy j: Minimize adverse impacts of development on water resources and stream valleys.

- Policy k: Minimize the effects of storm water outfalls on parkland.
- Policy l: Site storm water management facilities on parklands only when a benefit to parklands and water quality is demonstrated.
- Policy m: Grant easements or encumbrances on parkland only when a benefit to parklands and water quality is demonstrated.
- Policy n: Minimize impacts of park maintenance and operation practices through the use of environmentally sound methods including Integrated Pest Management.

**Objective 3: Protect and preserve significant cultural resources on parklands.**

- Policy a: Determine the significance and appropriate preservation options for cultural resources that are proposed for inclusion in the integrated park system in accordance with the criteria for the U.S. Department of Interior National Register of Historic Places and the Fairfax County Criteria for Public Significance (See Objective 2, Policies a. and b. in the Heritage Resources section.)
- Policy b: Protect significant cultural resources, including archaeological sites, historic properties, buildings, structures, districts, landscapes, cemeteries and artifacts from degradation or damage and destruction.
- Policy c: Consider alternatives, in addition to fee-simple acquisition of cultural resources, such as the establishment of protective easements, to ensure preservation, stabilization, restoration and appropriate site planning and development.
- Policy d: Coordinate preservation of significant cultural resources with County, municipal, regional, state and federal agencies to ensure effective and consistent management and protection of these resources.

**Objective 4: Provide for current and future park and recreational needs through a combination of development of new and existing sites and the optimal use of all existing facilities.**

- Policy a: Ensure that facility service levels are commensurate with sustainable parkland and facility capacity. Service levels should relate to public needs as determined through periodic Park and Recreation Needs Assessments with community input.
- Policy b: Maximize the use of existing public facilities, including Fairfax County Public Schools, for community recreation purposes and provide non-motorized access through coordination among managing agencies of service provision, redevelopment and maintenance of recreation facilities.
- Policy c: Maximize opportunities to include accessible community recreation facilities on properties and in buildings acquired, planned, designed and developed by Fairfax County Public Schools or other public agencies.

- Policy d: Develop a regional and integrated open space and greenway system and provide mutually supportive recreation opportunities in cooperation with other public park agencies.
- Policy e: Ensure that the location, design, development and redevelopment of park resources are accessible for all populations and are adaptable to changing recreational, demographic, and economic trends.
- Policy f: Integrate urban-scale parks into mixed-use developments or major employment centers.
- Policy g: Mitigate adverse impacts from park activities on surrounding neighborhoods through careful park planning, site design, management and operations.

**Objective 5: Ensure the long term protection, preservation and sustainability of park resources.**

- Policy a: Protect parklands from adverse impacts of off-site development and uses. Specifically, identify impacts from development proposals that may negatively affect parklands and private properties under protective easements and require mitigation and/or restoration measures, as appropriate.
- Policy b: Ensure the protection and appropriate resource management of, and public access to, designated stream valleys through dedication to the Fairfax County Park Authority or other park agencies.
- Policy c: Provide compensation for use of parklands for other than park purposes in accordance with adopted policies of the affected park agency.
- Policy d: Protect the public's parkland investment and ensure the safety, quality, and sustainable operation of parklands, facilities, and infrastructure.
- Policy e: Ensure that efficient park facility maintenance and management practices can be achieved to provide for long-term sustainability and preservation of the public investment.
- Policy f: Consider the location of major public facilities, including transportation and utility corridors, and telecommunication facilities, on or through parklands when the proposal meets the following conditions: (a) is consistent with the relevant policies of the managing park agency; (b) the managing park agency determines that the proposed facility is compatible with the existing and future use of parkland, (c) the managing park agency concurs that there is no feasible or available alternative to the use of parklands and (d) the proposal will have minimal impacts on parkland, facilities, resources and user experience.
- Policy g: Protect parklands from encroachments and other unauthorized uses.
- Policy h: Where appropriate and feasible, apply better site design and low-impact development (LID) techniques in park development to reduce environmental impacts of development.

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- Objective 6:      Ensure the mitigation of adverse impacts to park and recreation facilities and service levels caused by growth and land development through the provision of proffers, conditions, contributions, commitments, and land dedication.**
- Policy a:      Offset residential development impacts to parks and recreation resources, facilities and service levels based on the adopted facility service level standards (Appendix 2). The provision of suitable new park and recreational lands and facilities will be considered in the review of land development proposals in accordance with Residential Development Criteria - Appendix 9 of the Land Use element of the Countywide Policy Plan.
- Policy b:      To implement Policy a. above, residential land development should include provisions for contributions, or dedication, to the Park Authority of usable parkland and facilities, public trails, development of recreational facilities on private open space, and/or provision of improvements at existing nearby park facilities.
- Policy c:      Non-residential development should offset significant impacts of work force growth on the parks and recreation system.
- Policy d:      Ensure that Comprehensive Plan land use amendment proposals for higher densities include recommendations for the provision of parkland and trails to offset the impacts of increased density.
- Policy e:      Seek dedication of appropriate lands to the Fairfax County Park Authority that meet the criteria for Resource Protection Areas and parkland adjacent to stream valleys as defined respectively by the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance and the Fairfax County Park Authority Stream Valley Policy.
- Policy f:      Encourage developers to cooperatively develop publicly accessible urban parks, connective trails, park amenities and active recreation facilities in Tysons Corner Urban Center, Transit Station Areas, Suburban Centers, Community Business Centers and identified “Town Centers” or mixed-use activity centers.
- Policy g:      Apply appropriate design standards to all facilities proposed for inclusion in the park system.
- Policy h:      On development adjacent to park property, encourage designs that minimize the potential for encroachments and adverse environmental impacts on parkland and that augment the natural resource values of the parkland.

## APPENDIX 1

### PARK CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

#### INTRODUCTION

The Park Classification System is a general framework intended to guide open space and public facilities planning, and also to assist in the development of public and private land management plans, by grouping parks according to certain common typical characteristics. The Park Classification System specifically supports Countywide Objective 1, Policy a. by outlining the primary purpose, location and access, character and extent of development for the following park classifications:

- A. Local Parks
- B. District Parks
- C. Countywide Parks
- D. Resource-Based Parks
- E. Regional Parks

This Park Classification System is augmented by state and federal park areas within Fairfax County boundaries.

Park Classifications provide guidance: a) to the Planning Commission for determining whether a proposed park site is in substantial conformance with the County Comprehensive Plan; b) for determining the appropriate geographic location and equitable distribution of varying types of parks; c) to the park planning staff during the park planning and development process; and d) to set public expectations for future park uses. Park master planning, determination of substantial conformance with the County Comprehensive Plan pursuant to Code of Virginia section 15.2-2232 (known as the 2232 process), and capital funding allocations are all public processes that precede development on parkland.

Criteria for each park class are provided in the individual descriptions below. The general areas of consideration are:

1. **Purpose** - indicates the general park use.
2. **Location and Access** - indicates the appropriate location and means of access.
3. **Character and Extent of Development** - indicates the general park size range, typical facility types, the extent of development, the general experience a user may expect and any special considerations. Site-specific facilities and uses are determined through the park master planning process for individual parks. The park master planning process is a public process that provides opportunities for public input and requires approval by the appointed officials of the respective park agency or elected officials of local municipalities.

#### A. LOCAL PARKS

##### Purpose

This general classification of parks includes parks that serve neighborhoods and mixed use centers in suburban and urban areas of the County. Local parks primarily offer a variety of active or passive recreation opportunities, or a combination of both, in close proximity to County residents and employment centers. Areas designated for natural and/or cultural resource protection may also

be included within these parks.

### Location and Access

Local parks should be located to serve local residential neighborhoods, broader residential communities and/or urban employment or mixed-use centers. Pedestrian, bicycle and/or car access is appropriate depending on the setting and access features. Whenever feasible, locate these parks adjacent to elementary or intermediate schools to maximize collocation of recreation facilities; In mixed-use developments, proximity to retail/office areas is desirable for collocation of parking and minimum impact on residences.

### Character and Extent of Development

Local parks primarily provide facilities for active or passive recreation, or both; areas for scheduled and unscheduled recreation activities and social gathering places; and serve residential, employment and mixed-use centers. In suburban settings, park size will typically be at least 2.5 acres and less than 50 acres, but some local parks may range up to 75 acres. In urban areas, park size is typically less than 5 acres and often less than ½ acre. Visits to local parks will typically be less than two hours.

The character of local parks may vary depending on their location within the County. In residential settings, local parks will generally be larger than in urban parts of the County. Local parks offer open space to those with little or no yards. Typical facilities may include open play areas, playgrounds, courts, athletic fields, game areas, trails, trail connections, natural areas, picnic facilities and facility lighting. In a suburban setting and depending on the park size and facilities, the local park service area may be up to 3 miles.

The user experience at local parks may be casual and informal geared toward social interaction, play and outdoor enjoyment, or may be more structured to support organized sports and park programs. Collocation of a mix of park uses and facilities that support both informal and structured activities is increasingly necessary to meet the County's diverse and varied recreation and leisure needs where available land is diminishing. To the extent possible, facilities will be planned so that areas that address different needs are compatible.

In urban areas, urban-scale local parks are appropriate. These publicly accessible urban parks should include facilities that are pedestrian-oriented and provide visual enhancement, a sense of identity, opportunities for social interactions, enjoyment of outdoor open space and performing and visual arts. Urban parks are generally integrated into mixed use developments or major employment centers in areas of the County that are planned or developed at an urban scale. Areas in the County that are generally appropriate for urban parks include Tysons Corner Urban Center, Transit Station Areas, Suburban Centers, Community Business Centers and identified "Town Centers" or mixed-use activity centers. Urban parks can be administered by private land owners, Fairfax County Park Authority, or through joint public and private sector agreements for public benefit.

Primary elements of urban-scale local parks are ease of non-motorized access and a location that complements, or is integrated with, surrounding uses. Features may include urban style plazas, mini-parks, water features and trail connections, oriented to pedestrian and/or bicycle use by employees and residents. Park architectural characteristics reflect the built environment. Short-term, informal activities and programmed events during lunch hours and after-work hours are intended to foster social interactions among users, provide leisure opportunities, and create a visual identity to strengthen sense of place and orientation. In urban areas, park size is typically less than

five acres and often under ½ acre. Service area is generally within a 5-10 minute walking distance from nearby offices, retail and residences. Well-conceived and executed design is critical to the viability of this type of park. To be successful urban parks need high visibility, easy access, lots of pedestrian traffic, immediacy of casual food service, access to basic utilities, landscaped vegetated areas, ample seating, high quality materials, a focal point or identity, regular custodial maintenance, and an inviting and safe atmosphere.

The Area Plans element of the Comprehensive Plan delineates the park classifications of all public park sites in the County. The specific types of facilities to be developed at each Local Park site is determined by the managing park agency with public participation through its Park Planning and Development process.

## **B. DISTRICT PARKS**

### Purpose

This park classification includes larger parks that serve larger geographic areas of the County and provide a variety of indoor and outdoor recreation facilities and park experiences. Portions of these parks may be designated for natural and/or cultural resource protection.

### Location and Access

These parks may be located in most areas of the County. Access should be available by the major arterials and the Countywide Trail System to encourage pedestrian and bicycle trips; public transit access is also desirable. The service area can range from 3 to 6 miles. Size is typically 50 to 150 acres. Parking must be provided.

### Character and Extent of Development

District Parks provide diverse opportunities for passive and active recreation uses. Generally, facilities in these parks are larger in number and scale than at Local Parks and support a longer visit.

District Parks may combine recreation-oriented complexes of developed facilities with areas of the park that are undeveloped. The extent of development will depend on actual site conditions, such as topography, amount of developable acreage, and access. Appropriate facilities include those that support active and passive recreation, often clustered together, areas for programmed activities and gathering places and areas designated for resource protection. Lighted facilities and extended hours of operation are the norm.

These parks offer diverse experiences and activities that typically involve an individual or group for a time period of up to a half day and may attract spectators or participants. Typical recreation activities at District Parks include golf, skating, cultural and holiday events, performing arts, sports play and activities scheduled in RECenters. Additionally, woodlands, open space, trails and open play areas are highly desirable features. Sensitive environmental areas and cultural resource sites within the parks will be managed as Natural or Cultural Resource Areas.

The Area Plans element of the Comprehensive Plan delineates the park classifications of all park sites in the County. The specific types of facilities to be developed at each District Park and support amenities, such as parking, lighting and restrooms, is determined by the managing park agency with public participation through its Park Planning and Development process.

## **C. COUNTYWIDE PARKS**

### Purpose

This park classification includes larger parks that serve the County and provides a variety of larger-scale indoor or outdoor recreation facilities, or both, and facilities that are unique within the County. Areas designated for natural and/or cultural resource protection may also be included within these parks.

### Location and Access

These parks may be located in most areas of the County. Access should be available by the major arterials and the Countywide Trail System to encourage pedestrian and bicycle trips; public transit is also desirable. The service area is typically larger than 5 miles often including the entire County, or larger, depending on the facilities and location. Park size is typically 150 acres or more. Parking must be provided.

### Character and Extent of Development

Countywide Parks provide diverse opportunities for passive and active recreation uses to a wide range of simultaneous users. Generally, these parks provide complexes of intensively developed activity areas. The complexes may include multiple facilities for the same activity, an assortment of different activity focuses in one or more areas of the park, and/or unique facilities found in only one or a few parks within the entire park system. Facilities in these parks are larger in scale than those found in District Parks

Countywide Parks may combine larger complexes of developed areas with extensive natural areas. The extent of development will depend on actual site conditions, such as topography, amount of developable acreage, access and intensity of adjacent land uses. Appropriate facilities include those typically found in District Parks as well as the facilities unique to Countywide Parks and the support uses necessary for a full day activity such as concessions and restrooms. Formally scheduled community gathering places and areas for large programmed activities and events are also typical. Lighted facilities and extended hours of operation are the norm.

These parks offer diverse experiences and activities that typically involve an individual or group for a time period of up to a day and which may attract large numbers of spectators or participants. Typical activities include those found in District Parks as well as facilities such as sports complexes, indoor gymnasiums, field houses and lakefront parks. Sensitive environmental areas and cultural resource sites within the parks will be managed as Natural or Cultural Resource Areas.

The Area Plans element of the Comprehensive Plan delineates the park classifications of all park sites in the County. The specific types of facilities to be developed at each Countywide Park and support amenities, such as parking, lighting and restrooms, is determined by the managing park agency with public participation through its Park Planning and Development process.

## **D. RESOURCE-BASED PARKS**

### Purpose

This classification includes parks that primarily preserve, protect, and interpret natural and/or cultural resources.

### Location and Access

The location for Resource-based Parks is determined by the location of the specific resources. Size and access can take many forms depending on the setting and type of resources. Access to stream valleys is primarily by trails; however trailheads with parking should be strategically located along trail routes. Management plans should give consideration to the resource and allow public use only as it is compatible with resource protection.

### Character and Extent of Development

Resource-based Parks are selected for inclusion in the park system because of their exemplary natural and/or cultural features and are acquired, identified and preserved for stewardship and protection. Protection and stewardship of unique natural and cultural resources provide a variety of public benefits. These parks provide educational and interpretative opportunities relative to environmental and cultural resources. These lands may offer opportunities to restore degraded areas and to protect, increase and restore biodiversity of species that may inhabit these areas. In addition, passive recreation opportunities and facilities are also appropriate at these parks. Development which does not adversely affect resources and which enhances awareness of the resource values is appropriate. Development of public sites should include opportunities for public education and enjoyment. Interpretive (educational) facilities and structures may include visitor centers, nature centers, orientation kiosks, nature watching stations, demonstration areas, preserved buildings and gardens, hiking, biking and equestrian trails as designated. To the extent that they do not adversely impact the resources themselves, support amenities may also be developed such as picnicking areas, restrooms, signs, benches and parking. Trails and trail connections are a significant feature at these parks, especially along stream valleys and often serve as Countywide trail connections.

Stream valleys are a predominant physiographic feature of Fairfax County and comprise the core of the County's Environmental Quality Corridor (EQC) system. Parks located in and along the stream valleys encompass those segments of EQCs planned for public parkland and comprise the core elements of a greenway network that links areas notable for significant natural and cultural resources with residential and employment areas throughout the County. They may vary in size and character from steeply sloped corridors with cascading streams to broad floodplains; all are treated as sensitive environmental areas. Trails within stream valleys should be located to be sensitive to environmental conditions. In addition to trails, seating areas, small picnic and open play areas, landscaping and interpretive structures may also be developed, if they do not adversely impact the EQC or ecological functions.

The user experience at Resource-based Parks will be varied. These parks support nature, horticulture and history programs as well as more casual interests such as gardening, nature watching and appreciation of local, regional, state and national history. Settings for quiet contemplation are appropriate in these parks. Visitors may frequent these parks on a regular or occasional basis.

The Area Plans element of the Comprehensive Plan delineates the park classifications of all park sites in the County. The specific types of facilities and support amenities, such as parking, lighting and restrooms, to be developed at each Resource-Based Park is determined by the managing agency with public participation through its Park Planning and Development process.

## **E. REGIONAL PARKS**

### Purpose

Regional Parks are lands or facilities administered by the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority (NVRPA), with region-wide significance that supplement and enhance the County and

municipal park systems within the six participating political jurisdictions. NVRPA parks and facilities serve a multi-jurisdictional constituency.

NVRPA's Park Classification System was developed within the context of its mission, goals and objectives: 1) to distinguish regional parks from local, state and federal parks; 2) to provide a concise description of the management functions and responsibilities of the Authority; and 3) to apply to regional parklands and recreational facilities. While the classification system is comprehensive, it is not mutually exclusive, and some parks may fall within more than one classification.

#### Location and Access

NVRPA owns more than 10,000 acres of public parkland and has developed nineteen parks in its service area of Fairfax, Arlington and Loudoun Counties and the cities of Fairfax, Falls Church and Alexandria. Facilities within this service area are typically accessible within a 1 to 1.5 hour drive by car and by foot, bicycle and equestrian trails. Eleven Regional Parks consisting of more than 8,000 acres, are located within Fairfax County.

#### Character and Extent of Development

The character and extent of development for regional parks is directed by its Park Classification System that contains six categories, each with its own criteria. These criteria identify the park purpose and provide general planning and development guidelines and resource management and use policies. Individual Park Master Plans, created for each park, work in conjunction with the NVRPA classification system to further define use and management of the park as a resource. The general purpose and character of NVRPA's six park classifications are briefly defined below:

**Regional Land Bank** - This designation provides the NVRPA with an administrative mechanism to hold lands on a temporary basis pending decisions on classification or disposition. Because the land will be held under this designation on a temporary basis, planning for these areas will occur only as required.

**Regional Conservation Area** - This designation places public ownership or control over regionally significant natural areas or water resources, so as to protect and preserve their unique environmental, cultural, ecological or scenic value. The primary long-term objective is to limit the development of these areas to preserve their "wilderness-like" qualities.

**Regional Shoreline Park** - These parks preserve riparian lands adjacent to regionally significant water resources, and provide public access for educational and environmental study and recreational and scenic enjoyment. Long-term objectives for these parks vary for natural and recreational areas. Natural areas are limited to development and use consistent with preserving their natural characteristics. Recreational areas allow for development of facilities consistent with regional needs, with particular emphasis on water access and the creative use of recreational and water resources.

**Regional Trail and Greenway Park** - Designated as networks of linear corridors or parks that connect recreational, natural, and/or cultural resources, these parks provide regionally significant links to comprehensive regional greenways and open space. The primary long-term objective will be contribution to and completion of a regional greenway and open-space plan for Northern Virginia.

**Regional Historic/Cultural Park** - This designation preserves structures and/or sites deemed significant to the history and culture of Northern Virginia. Long-term objectives include continued development of interpretive facilities on currently held park sites, as funding permits.

**Regional Recreational/Special Multi-Use Park** - These parks contain specialized recreational and other public facilities or opportunities, which, because of their specialized nature, cost or demand, are not otherwise generally available within local parks, or offered by local park and recreation agencies. The long-term objectives for these parks include pursuing new and innovative park, recreational or other public facilities which avoid duplication of local, state and federal park facilities.

## APPENDIX 2

### STANDARDS AND CRITERIA FOR ESTABLISHMENT OF PARK AND RECREATION FACILITIES

Public park and recreation providers traditionally employ a variety of standards and criteria for determining appropriate levels and areas of service and requirements for protection of significant and sensitive resources. Frequently, those standards may be expressed in terms of the relationships between population and the requisite number of acres of parkland or specific facility types. In the application of such criteria, care should be taken that minimum standards are not translated into acceptable levels of service.

The goal of park and recreation providers is to meet the needs and desires of the public to the extent possible under constraints of land and funding availability and sustainable development, and both the private and public sector will benefit from coordinated planning to achieve this end. If Fairfax County is to achieve its goal of a comprehensive parks, recreation, and open space system, established criteria and standards should be incorporated into both public and private land use decisions for public benefit. The standards represented below are the result of extensive research and analysis of public needs conducted as part of the Fairfax County Park Authority's Needs Assessment conducted in 2003.

The County utilizes two sets of guidelines to accomplish its objectives for the provision of park and recreation services. The first is the Park Classification System, presented in Appendix 1. The second guideline is a set of population-based standards for parkland acreage suitable for recreation and specific types of park facilities. The guidelines described below are Countywide standards. Actual service levels will vary across the County depending on the facility type and location and population density in the service area.

#### A. PARKLAND ACREAGE STANDARDS

To support a balanced park system with diverse park experiences, park acreage standards are established for Local Parks and District and Countywide Parks and reflect distinct park service types:

1. **For Local Parkland, provide a minimum of 5 acres per 1,000 population.** Applicable acreage includes land suitable for active recreation in the following sites:
  - Publicly owned Local Parks
  - Publicly accessible urban parks
  - Privately owned local parkland

This acreage standard is based on the average amount of land required to develop local-serving active recreation facilities per adopted standards. Generally, a minimum of 2.5 acres suitable for development of active recreation facilities is desirable. Where additional land is required due to site characteristics, the total acreage required to accommodate these facilities should take precedence over the minimum acreage standards.

2. **For District and Countywide Parkland, provide a minimum of 13 acres per 1,000 population.** Applicable acreage includes land suitable for recreation uses provided on:
  - Publicly owned District and Countywide Parks

- Regional, state and federal parks, or portions thereof, that provide District and
- Countywide-serving recreation opportunities

**B. PARK FACILITY SERVICE LEVEL STANDARDS**

The following Countywide service level standards are established for core park facilities on a population basis. Area-specific analysis is conducted to determine cumulative localized facility needs for planning purposes and to identify development impacts of new residential units.

Implementation of these standards will take place through the following mechanisms:

1. Public and private park and recreation facility providers should evaluate their contribution percentage levels compared to these standards, determine their respective roles in meeting these standards and plan their park systems or facilities accordingly.
2. Park Master Planning and Long-Range Planning processes
3. Parks Capital Improvement Planning and Programming
4. Seek developer commitments to offset development impact through the County Development Review Process
5. Park Land Acquisition Programs

Countywide service level standards established for park facilities are as follows:

<b>Park Facility</b>	<b>Population-based Countywide Service Level Standard</b>
<b>Rectangle Fields (soccer, football, lacrosse, field hockey and cricket fields)</b>	<b>1 field/2,700</b>
<b>Adult Softball Diamonds with Skinned Infields</b>	<b>1 field/22,000</b>
<b>Youth Softball Diamonds with Skinned Infields</b>	<b>1 field/8,800</b>
<b>Youth Baseball Diamonds with Grassed Infields</b>	<b>1 field/7,200</b>
<b>Adult Baseball Diamonds with Grassed Infields</b>	<b>1 field/24,000</b>
<b>Trails (measured in miles)</b>	<b>Consistent with Adopted Countywide Trails Plan and Goal to Link Trails to Park Facilities</b>
<b>Playgrounds</b>	<b>1 playground/2,800</b>
<b>Multi-use Courts</b>	<b>1 court/2,100</b>
<b>Reservable Picnic Areas</b>	<b>1 site/12,000</b>
<b>Neighborhood Dog Parks (Typically less than 3 acres)</b>	<b>1 site/86,000</b>

<b>Park Facility</b>	<b>Population-based Countywide Service Level Standard</b>
<b>Regional Dog Parks</b> (Typically more than 8 acres with special event features)	<b>1 site/400,000</b>
<b>Neighborhood Serving Skate Parks-</b> (Modular/Portable Types)	<b>1 site/106,000</b>
<b>Countywide Skate Parks-</b> (Larger Permanent/Fixed Type)	<b>1 site/210,000</b>
<b>Golf</b> (measured by number of golf holes)	<b>1 hole/3,200</b>
<b>Nature Centers</b> (measured in building square feet)	<b>0.04 sf/person</b>
<b>RECenters including Indoor Aquatics, Fitness and other Community Uses</b> (measured in building square feet)	<b>1.1 sf/person</b>
<b>Indoor Gyms</b> (measured in building square feet)	<b>2.8 sf/person</b>
<b>Outdoor Family Aquatics Facilities</b>	<b>1 site/570,000</b>
<b>Horticulture/Garden Parks</b>	<b>1 site/350,000</b>
<b>Equestrian Facilities</b>	<b>1 site/595,000</b>
<b>Waterfront Parks</b>	<b>1 site/90,000</b>

**C. PARKLAND ACQUISITION CRITERIA**

Parkland acquisition opportunities take many forms including dedication, donation, fee simple purchase, lease agreements, partnerships, easements, and use of eminent domain powers. The Fairfax County Park Authority Land Acquisition Criteria Policy is as follows:

1. The Park Authority shall have an acreage standard for development of recreational facilities.
  - a. These established acreage standards for Local, and District and Countywide Parkland are cited in Section A above. This amount of land is necessary to accommodate the combination of recreational facilities typically desired by Fairfax County residents at use levels reported in the 2003 Needs Assessment process. This acreage standard shall be periodically reviewed and evaluated in conjunction with future Demand Surveys.
  - b. Subject to park classification criteria and site conceptual development plans, identified needs within the service area may be met in various combinations of existing or newly acquired park sites or school sites.

- c. Acreage of homeowner association common open space, developed with local-serving park facilities, may be applied in determining the adequacy of park and recreation areas to serve that residential development.
  - d. Acreage of Resource-based Parks shall not be applied in meeting this standard.
2. The Park Authority shall have criteria for acquisition and/or protection of natural and cultural resource sites.
  - a. As a matter of policy, the uniqueness and value of natural and cultural resources, as determined by adopted criteria, are the primary requisites for acquisition and appropriate development and use levels.
  - b. Protection and preservation of these resources shall be achieved through a combination of donation, dedication or acquisition of fee simple property or conservation easements.
3. The Park Authority shall have criteria for acceptance of gifts of real property.
  - a. Land proposed for donation to the Park Authority is subject to the same standards and procedures for evaluation and inspection as property considered for fee simple purchase, including any potential deed restrictions and conformance with generally accepted professional practices for appraisal, environmental assessment and liability for site contamination.
  - b. Suitability for development and management of the site in accordance with the Park Authority Park Classification System, Program Criteria and Standards and current Needs Assessments also shall be a consideration in decisions to accept donations of real property.

The Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority land acquisition policy is to acquire land for the purpose of enhancing its current system of regional parks. Specific land acquisition interests include:

- The acquisition of large regional parks (generally more than 500 acres)
- The acquisition of adjacent lands for the enlargement of existing regional parks
- The acquisition of additional shoreline
- Other acquisition opportunities deemed regional in nature