



# PARKS & Recreation

## MASTER PLAN

"Get Up, Get Out, Get Active"



# Charlotte County Parks & Recreation Master Plan Update 2015–2050



# Acknowledgements

The following elected officials, departments, boards, committees, and consultants participated in the development of the Charlotte County Parks and Recreation Master Plan Update.

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## **Residents of Charlotte County**

A special thank you goes out to the public who attended workshops and provided responses online.



Get Up !

Get Out !

Get Active !

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# Introduction

The Charlotte County Parks and Recreation Master Plan (Master Plan) will guide the Community Services Department Parks and Recreation Divisions' investments and strategies over the next 35 years (FY 2015/2016 through 2050), shaping the delivery of parks and recreation services in a manner consistent with the County's vision and goals. The Master Plan will strategically help the Divisions respond to three important questions:

1. *What do we do?*
2. *For whom do we do it?*
3. *How do we excel?*

This Master Plan is an update to the County's 1997 Charlotte County Parks Master Plan and will:

- update the standards for parks and recreation level of service to be more reflective of emerging trends,
- identify development priorities and recommendations on capital improvement projects, and
- guide the County in effective decision-making and equitable allocation of services to address needs and shortfalls in the parks system.

This Master Plan provides guiding principles, long-range objectives, and implementable and high-level strategies and initiatives. The Master Plan is divided into four parts:

- Part One: The Setting summarizes the planning process, including the context of the Master Plan within the County's Comprehensive Plan, background research, and public engagement.
- Part Two: The Future outlines the newly-created vision, strategic direction, guiding principles, and recommendations borne out of engagement with the community, regional and state agencies, and County staff.

- Part Three: System Building Blocks includes initiatives that will help the Parks and Recreation Divisions establish the systems and processes to best modernize the parks system and improve service delivery.
- Part Four: Plan Implementation identifies the projects, capital plan, funding, and management policies.

## Funding

The Parks and Recreation Divisions are responsible for the planning, programming, and management of Charlotte County's parks and recreation system. To ensure that it operates within its funding allocations and generated revenue, the Divisions must continue to adjust service provision, facility maintenance, and operations levels. The Master Plan emphasizes the importance of ensuring that the highest parks and recreation priorities, as defined by the guiding principles of this Master Plan, are met. However, current and future needs will not be met without additional investment.

## Moving Forward

With the acceptance of this Master Plan, Charlotte County commits to the new vision, strategic direction, guiding principles, objectives, and strategies contained in this document.

### Vision

We envision an unparalleled, attractive, connected, and sustainable parks and recreation system that focuses on regional and community-based opportunities, while preserving environmentally-sensitive resources and enticing residents and visitors to **"Get Up. Get Out. Get Active."**

### Strategic Direction

The Master Plan promotes the development of a diverse yet balanced, high-quality and integrated parks, recreation, and regional trails system to meet community-wide current and future recreation needs.

## Guiding Principles

To achieve the vision and strategic direction of the Master Plan, the County has established the following guiding principles:

1. Diversity & Distribution of Inventory & Services
2. Economic Vitality through Parks
3. Service Excellence
4. Positive Partnerships
5. Sustainable Practices
6. Health & Wellness
7. Continuous Improvement

Goals, objectives, and strategies are organized around these seven guiding principles.

## Agency Accreditation

With the adoption of this Master Plan, the County will move forward in seeking agency accreditation through the National Recreation and Park Association's Commission for Accreditation of Parks and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA). CAPRA accreditation demonstrates that an agency meets established benchmarks for delivering high-quality service. The accreditation process is discussed further in Part Four.

## Implementation

The final outcome of the Master Plan identifies collaborative partnerships, results-oriented processes, and creative and innovative standards. Part Four of this Master Plan includes recommendations for implementation that are linked to the guiding principles, objectives, and strategies.

## Annual Action Planning Process

To ensure that the intent of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan is being met, the Community Services Department Parks and Recreation Divisions will perform an annual action planning review and update park inventory based on increases or decreases in acreage, facilities, and services. The review will be performed prior to the County's budget and capital improvement programming to request funding for new parkland, facilities, services, and operating budgets. The annual action planning process includes the following tasks:

- Review Master Plan, acknowledge and celebrate implementation successes.
- Review Part 4 and update status based on completed projects and initiatives.
- Update the Needs Assessment data and inventory.
- Identify emerging recreational trends.
- Create 2-year action plan that includes operating and capital budgets, action items and other items geared to Master Plan implementation.



# Part One: The Setting

## 1.1 Overview of Charlotte County

Charlotte County is located on the coast of Southwest Florida bounded by Sarasota, DeSoto, Lee, Glades, and Hendry counties. Charlotte Harbor, one of the oldest areas located within Charlotte County, boasts one of the most productive and natural preserve estuaries in Florida.

The Charlotte Harbor area was platted in the 1860s around the fishing pier, which was used to ship cattle during the Civil War and for trade with Cuba and the Caribbean after the war. The County was founded in 1921 after separating from Manatee and DeSoto counties. The County did not undergo much development until the 1960s–70s when surrounding areas began to develop.

### 1.1.1 Assets

Charlotte County has many assets available to improve the comfort and diverse lifestyle of its residents. One of the greatest benefits is the large amount of waterfront and environmentally-protected property available for beachfront parks, boating, kayaking, paddle boarding, bird watching, fishing, and other environmental activities.

Another major County asset is the Charlotte Sports Park, where the Tampa Bay Rays spring training is held and the home of the Charlotte Stone Crabs. Other County assets include the seasonal population, which boosts the economic development opportunities, and the well-established park foundation.



### 1.1.2 Challenges

One of the greatest challenges the County has is its large geographic distribution with a lack of connectivity and no fixed-route public transportation. This makes accessing public parks and recreational facilities more difficult for users.

Other challenges Charlotte County Parks and Recreation Divisions are faced with include communicating and focusing on providing general recreational needs to the community at large while balancing the request of special interest groups; aging demographics; keeping up with the ever-changing recreational trends and demand for facilities; available financing and funding for improving and maintaining existing and future parks and facilities; ongoing coordination with other parks, recreation, and trails organizations; and the implementation of adopted County policies.



## 1.2 Regulatory Direction

The master planning effort is a key implementation strategy in the County's primary planning document, the Charlotte 2050 Comprehensive Plan, and one of the elements in the Comprehensive Plan, the Recreation and Open Space Element (REC Element), provides for a system of parks and recreation sites available to all of Charlotte County's citizens and visitors. The County's parks and recreation programs are two tangible ways to shape a more sustainable and livable county. The Charlotte 2050 Comprehensive Plan and the REC Element were major guiding documents during the drafting of this Master Plan. Many of the objectives and strategies identified for the implementation of this Parks and Recreation Master Plan were derived from these planning documents, most specifically the Rec Charlotte 2050 Plan.

### 1.2.1 Planning Framework

The future land use and the neighborhood types, as established in the County's adopted Comprehensive Plan and Future Land Use Map Series, are important to establish the direction for future residential development of Charlotte County to accommodate user demand and planning of parklands, facilities, and programs. The Comprehensive Plan calls for the distribution of the identified neighborhood types to be considered in locating and providing recreation facilities. The County has identified four neighborhood types:

1. *Revitalizing Neighborhoods* – Predominantly built-out, aging housing, and commercial stock, reinvestment, and revitalization needed. Revitalizing neighborhoods are located primarily in the more urban areas of the county. Many of these neighborhoods are located within redevelopment districts.
2. *Maturing Neighborhoods* – Substantially developed, potential for infill, need to be protected. These neighborhoods are also located in the more urban areas of the county and usually located on the fringe or adjacent to revitalizing neighborhoods.

3. *Emerging Neighborhoods* – Mostly undeveloped lots, opportunity for balanced, mixed growth. The majority of these areas are located in the southern and eastern portions of the county, adjacent to Punta Gorda or associated with a development of regional impact.
4. *Managed Neighborhoods* – Mostly platted under-developed lots adjacent to sensitive environmental resources, infill and intensification discouraged. These areas are located primarily the in western portion of the county.

Whereas the neighborhood framework is understandable to professional planners, during the master planning outreach activities it was discovered that the public did not grasp the terminology or primary significance of using the neighborhood framework when it came to providing parks, recreation, and trail facilities. During public conversations, people referenced park locations as well as where they resided more by geographical area than any other descriptor.

### 1.3 Creation of Planning Areas

To facilitate the ease of the planning framework and for effective communication with the county's residents, four recreational planning areas (RPA) were identified within the different geographic regions of Charlotte County. The purpose of the planning areas is to better facilitate the distribution of parks, recreation, and trails facilities, programs, services, and maintenance. People like to know what is available in their area.

RPA 1: West (between Gulf of Mexico and Myakka River). The majority of the future land use is low-density residential with some medium- and high-density residential. Large areas along the shoreline are designated as conservation/preservation. The four neighborhood types are located within RPA 1, with the majority consisting of Maturing and Managed neighborhoods. Small areas of Revitalizing and Emerging neighborhoods are concentrated along the shorelines.

Since the majority of RPA 1 is substantially developed (roads and platted lots) and adjacent to environmentally-sensitive lands, evaluation of existing park improvements and reprogramming activities may be necessary to meet future needs. Additional parks may be developed in the Emerging neighborhood adjacent to the Myakka River, and potential natural resource interpretation facilities may be developed in the Managed neighborhood. This area is known as Englewood or the Cape Haze Peninsula.

RPA 2: North (north of the Peace River and Myakka River). The majority of the future land use is low-density residential and mixed-use. Large areas along the shoreline are designated as conservation/preservation. The four neighborhood types are located within RPA 2, with the majority consisting of Mature and Revitalizing neighborhoods. Small areas of Managed and Emerging neighborhoods are located at the east and west sides of the planning area.

Since the majority of RPA 2 is already built out and substantially developed, evaluation of existing park improvements and reprogramming activities may be necessary to meet future needs for RPA 2. Additional parks may be developed in the Emerging neighborhood adjacent to the Peace River, and potential natural resource interpretation facilities may be developed in the Managed neighborhood. RPA 2 also includes three community redevelopment areas—Murdock Village, Parkside, and Charlotte Harbor. It is important for the Parks and Recreation Divisions to work closely with the Charlotte County Office of Economic Development to facilitate the redevelopment and maintenance of existing parks and recreation facilities and development of future special purpose facilities that provide community level recreation access, as a means to encourage community investment.

RPA 3: South (between the Peace River, Charlotte Harbor and the agricultural/rural area; contains the City of Punta Gorda). The majority of the future land use is low-density residential with some high-density residential and mixed-use.

The Enterprise Charlotte Airport Park also dominates the planning area. Large areas along the shoreline, and south and east of the planning area are designated as conservation/preservation. Three neighborhood types are located within RPA 3, with the majority consisting of Emerging neighborhoods. Small areas of Maturing and Revitalizing neighborhoods are located to the north and central portions of RPA 3.

Since the majority of RPA 3 is mostly undeveloped lots, there are opportunities to develop new parks and facilities to meet the needs of the mixed growth. However, it is noted that platted subdivisions may bind the available acreage. Evaluation of existing park improvements and reprogramming of activities may be necessary within the Maturing and Revitalizing neighborhoods, since they are already built out and substantially developed. Since this area includes the City of Punta Gorda, ongoing communication should be maintained to fully meet the needs of all residents while minimizing the duplication of services and maximizing the expenditures of public funds to provide a diverse parks and recreation menu. The City of Punta Gorda park facilities include Harborwalk, Gilchrist Park, Laishley Park, Ponce de Leon Park, Punta Gorda Nature Park, Hounds of Henry Street (dog park), a diverse trail network, and several other smaller neighborhood parks. The Punta Gorda Community Redevelopment Area is located within RPA 3.

RPA 4: East (agricultural/rural area). The majority of the future land uses are resource conservation, agriculture, and some low- and high-density residential within the Babcock Mixed Use District. Emerging and Managed neighborhood types are located within RPA 4 with additional Development of Regional Impact (DRI) regulations. Population levels are currently very low; however, this will change with the development of the new "Town of Babcock."

The following maps show the location of the recreational planning areas on the future land use map and the County's neighborhood framework map.

Figure 1 Charlotte County Future Land Use

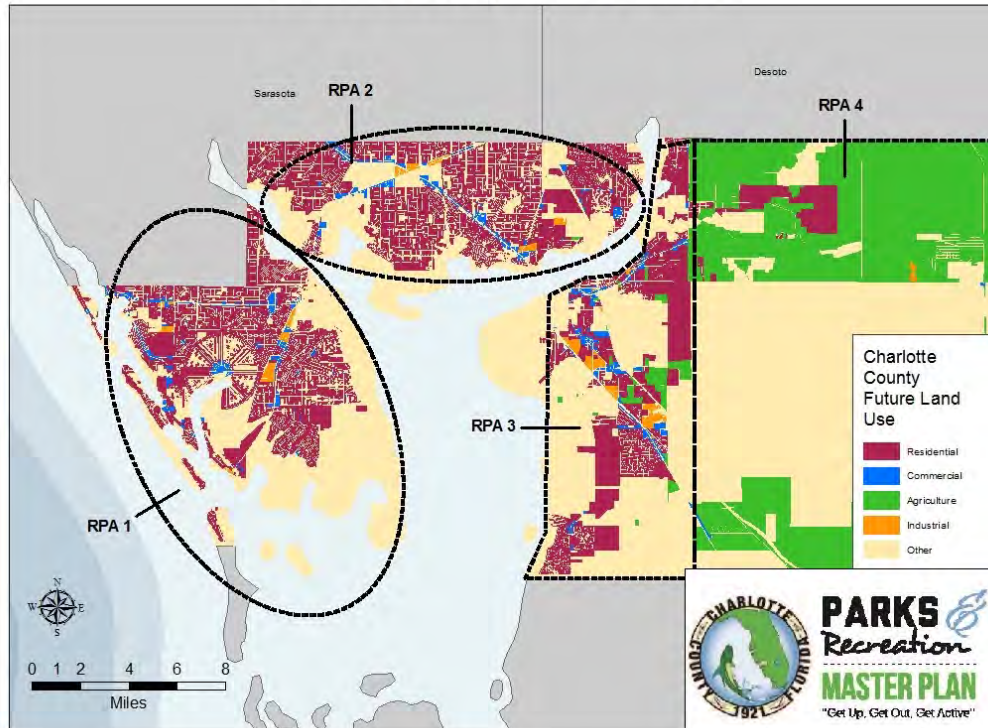
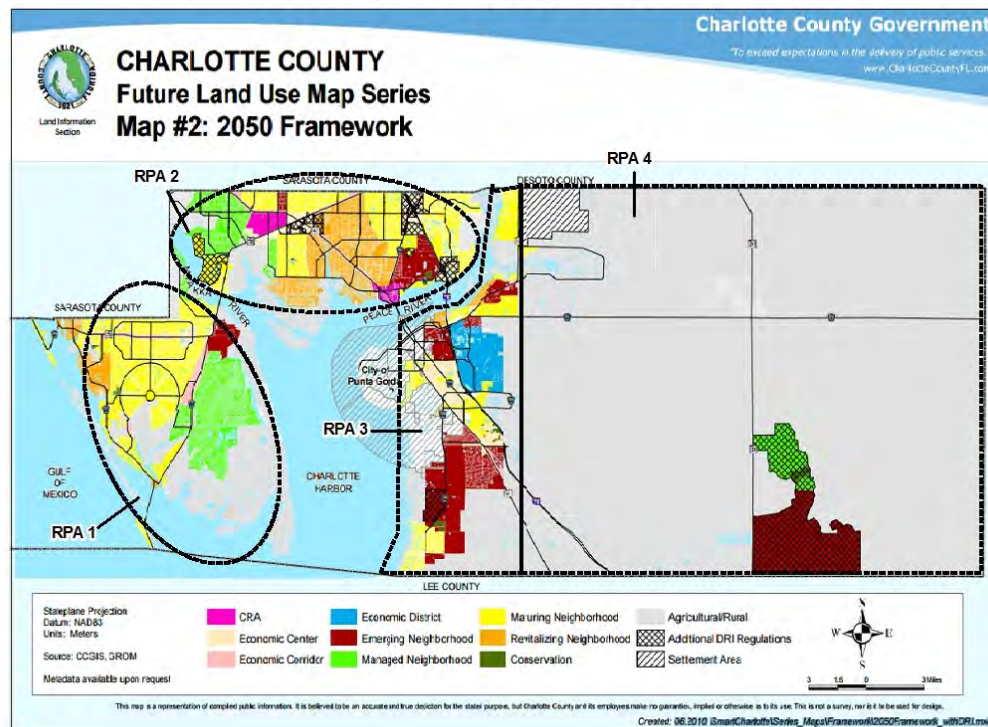


Figure 2 Charlotte County Future Neighborhood Framework



## 1.4 Parks Needs Assessment Study

The County contracted with Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) Department of Public Affairs to prepare the Charlotte County Parks Needs Assessment. Dated August 31, 2014, it was used as a basis in preparing the recommendations contained in this Master Plan. The Needs Assessment Study comprised several different elements, including 1) demographic study of users and associated growth trends; 2) recreational trends research; 3) an exhaustive policy, plan, and regulatory framework review; and 4) a level of service analysis comparing Charlotte County standards with other measures.

The following is a summary of the Needs Assessment completed by FGCU, along with augmenting information provided by the County and the Planning Team to further analyze level of service, recreational trends, service areas and existing condition.

### 1.4.1 Demographic Study

**Size.** The population of Charlotte County will be growing in size over the next 10–15 years. According to the study, estimates show that the population will reach 232,749 by the year 2050 (from the permanent population baseline of 160,602 in 2012).

**Age.** With this growth in population, the county will see a significant rise in the most senior age groups.

**Race/Diversity.** The racial diversity of the county will not change significantly from its current makeup. However, the Hispanic/Latino population is projected to grow in keeping with national population projection trends. Related to this projection, an increase is expected in the number of individuals who speak Spanish with a high degree of English-language fluency.

**Income.** Household income is projected to decrease into 2050. The study showed the income in the county decreasing in nearly every income category. This trend applies to all categories of income except for those making \$150,000–\$199,999, whose percentage will grow only by 0.3%. The most dramatic decline is

expected to occur in the \$35,000–\$49,999 income category, which is expected to decrease by more than 6%.

**Ability.** The number of individuals identified as having some type of disability is highest among the population age 65 and over, but is increasing slightly over all age groups.

### 1.4.2 Policy/Plan Regulatory Framework

The Needs Assessment also covered all of the relevant agencies that may have plans, policies, or initiatives that related to Charlotte County's park and recreation system. An additional spreadsheet was included as a tool to assist with identifying the relevant links to various plan documents and permitting rules.

### 1.4.3 Other Agencies

The following agencies were contacted and the information collected was reviewed and used as a basis for potential collaboration recommendations.

**City of Punta Gorda.** The city of Punta Gorda has 17 developed parks and recreation facilities. The city's LOS is acreage based at 5 acres of developed parklands per functional or seasonal population. The city also includes a system of bicycle and pedestrian trails/paths. This system includes 18 miles of trails/pathways that connect the city's neighborhoods, parks, and commercial areas. Three projects of importance include Harborwalk, Linear Park, and US 41 Multi-use Trail. The City's Parks and Recreation Master Plan includes the following goals.

- Offer a wider range of water-based activities throughout the park system.
- Maintain the unique small town, old Florida charm of Punta Gorda through the preservation and reinforcement of Historic Resources.
- Provide and encourage public spaces to soften the urban landscape—to put the right park with the right amenities in the right neighborhood.
- Provide tree lines avenues to connect parks, neighborhoods, and community destinations.

- Use multi-use recreational trails that connect parks, neighborhoods, civic places, and other community destinations.
- Design parks to accommodate multi-generational recreational needs.
- As transit becomes available, use it to reinforce community access to the park system.
- Encourage events and activities in the parks to enliven the public realm.
- Provide opportunities for continued economic and social development and sustainability.
- To ensure conservation areas and critical habitats are protected and preserved.
- Enhance existing and underdeveloped parks to maximize potential and increase neighborhood benefits.

*Federal Agencies.* Several federal agencies manage recreational areas within Charlotte County. The following were contacted and their information reviewed:

- National Park Service, most relevant to the County, is the NPS National Register of Historic Places.
- National Trail System (there are no National Trails currently within the county).
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages the Island Bay National Wildlife Refuge in Charlotte County. They are also a source of potential grants funding.
- U.S. Forest Service (there are no National Forests in Charlotte County).
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers may be of assistance in permitting and for resource based recreation opportunities.
- U.S. Department of Transportation manages the Recreational Trails Program and the National Scenic Byways Program. Currently there are no national trails or scenic byways in Charlotte County.
- U.S. Department of Commerce manages three programs that may be of interest to

Charlotte County. They are the National Estuarine Research Reserves, National Marine Sanctuary Program, and the National Coastal Zone Management Program. There are no facilities within Charlotte County. These programs may be a source for partnerships and possible funding for coastal and estuarine projects.

*Regional Agencies.* There are several agencies that either manage recreational facilities or have goals, objectives, and strategies relating to the provision of parks and recreation:

- The Charlotte County School District maintains an inter-local agreement with Charlotte County to provide for mutually-beneficial use of resources and provision of recreational, educational, and extracurricular opportunities. The siting of parks and schools in proximity should be a goal for both agencies. Joint-use agreements for recreational facilities should also be expanded.
- South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) currently does not have any acquisition plans within Charlotte County for sites that may offer recreation opportunities. Water quality improvements to the Charlotte Harbor and the Caloosahatchee Estuary are identified as priorities. The SFWMD Master Recreation Plan can provide development guidance for potential resource based facilities. Two other programs that may be of interest include the Lower Charlotte Harbor Surface Water Improvement and Management Plan and the Charlotte Harbor Flatwoods Initiative.
- Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) is responsible for approximately 46,609 acres of preserved lands within Charlotte County. Two facilities under the management of SWFWMD are the Charlotte Harbor Preserve State Park and the Prairie/Shell Creek Preserve. Potential partnerships exist through the SWFWMD Florida Forever Work Plan and the SWIM Plan.
- The Florida Sea Grant Program is a university-based program that supports



research, education, and extension to conserve coastal resources and enhance economic development. Two documents produced by the program that are important to the County in identifying water access opportunities include the *Recreational Boating Characteristics for the Greater Charlotte Harbor Study* and the *Future of Recreational Boating Access to Charlotte County Waterways*.

- SW Florida Regional Planning Council is a resource for conservation and land development practices.
- Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program identifies problems and opportunities for the Myakka, Peace, and Caloosahatchee rivers; the Dana, Roberts, and Lemon bays; and the Charlotte Harbor, Myakka, and Peace estuaries. There are currently no plans for land acquisition within Charlotte County.
- Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) Division of Recreation and Parks provides development guidance through the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) in addition to land management guidelines. There are several opportunities for collaboration, which is discussed in Section 1.4.5. FDEP is also potential source of grant funding.
- Office of Greenways and Trails, Recreational Trails Program provides a potential source of grant funds.
- Office of Coastal and Aquatic Managed Areas is a State agency responsible for the management of submerged lands and their associated marine resources. This agency manages two aquatic preserves within Charlotte County, the Cape Haze Aquatic Preserve and the Gasparilla Sound-Charlotte Harbor Aquatic Preserve.
- Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) manages and funds the Pedestrian and Bicycle Program. This program provides development guidelines for these facilities and can be used by the County in developing and applying for funding.

#### 1.4.4 Non-Profit and Private Providers

The Needs Assessment identified several non-profit and private organizations providing recreation services within Charlotte County. In addition, the Charlotte County Family YMCA and the Boys and Girls Club of Charlotte County also provide recreational opportunities.

*Lemon Bay Conservancy.* This is a non-profit land trust headquartered in Englewood, Florida. Its mission is to "Forever protect and preserve the natural features of Lemon Bay, Charlotte Harbor, their surrounding waters and uplands and vital fish habitat, through property preservation, environmental education, and advocacy for sustainable land use and water conservation policies and practices." The Lemon Bay Conservancy owns several properties as follows:

- Cedar Point Environmental Park. 1.8 acres
- James E. Cook Memorial Park, 52 acres
- Mangrove Place, 1 acre
- Hidden Lakes, 9.8 acres
- Wildflower Preserve, 80 acres
- Harbor Heights Scrub Jay Preserve, comprising 4 lots

*Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center, Inc. (CHEC).* This is a private, non-profit organization that provides environmental education and land management for properties located in the greater Charlotte Harbor area. Their properties include the following:

- Alligator Creek Preserve, adjacent to the Charlotte Harbor State Park Preserve, includes four miles of nature trails
- Cedar Point Environmental Park (owned by Charlotte County), a 115-acre site adjacent to Lemon Bay, Ainger Creek, and Oyster Creek. Site includes environmental center/visitor center, trails, playground, picnic area, and educational exhibits. CHEC provides a variety of educational programs at the site.

*Florida Track and Trails.* This facility is located at 37450 Bermont Road in Punta Gorda. Phase I of this facility is currently open on the weekends, and Phase II is under construction, with an

estimated completion date sometime in 2016. Once totally completed, it will include the following:

- 26 miles of one directional off road trails
- Off road vehicle repair and rental facility
- Paintball area, 40 acres
- Outdoor amphitheater, 15,000 seating capacity
- 5 off road vehicle tracks (i.e., motorcross, mud track, and a kids track)
- Special event facilities
- Camping area with 500 slips
- General Store
- Convenience facilities
- 12-acre fresh water lake, beach, fishing areas, play areas and concessions
- Zip Line

The facility is being designed for up to 20,000 daily visitors.

*Redneck Yacht Club.* This is a private park located at 44570 Bermont Road, Punta Gorda, Florida. The 800-acre park was designed to offer off road recreational vehicle riding facilities. The amenities provided at this park include the following:

- Off-road vehicular trails
- ATV riding area
- Mud tracks
- Primitive camping areas
- Stage area for concerts
- Concessions and convenience facilities

The park is open Friday through Sunday for the track. Special event tickets are \$70 at the gate.

*Charlotte County Family YMCA.* The Charlotte County Family YMCA provides family-focused recreation experiences at its facilities in addition to recreational programming at other facilities throughout the county. The following are facilities identified through the Charlotte County Family YMCA website:

- Franz Ross Park YMCA is located at the County's Franz Ross Park at 19333 Quesada Avenue, Port Charlotte. Hours of operation are Monday-Friday 5:30am-9:00pm, Saturday 7:00am-5:00pm, and Sunday 9:00am-4:00pm. Facilities include a wellness center with weight room, indoor heated pool, hot tub, steam rooms, locker rooms, child watch, group exercise room, stretching area, massage therapy, multipurpose room and group personal training room. Tennis programs are offered through the Y at Franz Ross Park.
- Punta Gorda YMCA is located at 2905 Tamiami Trail, Punta Gorda. Hours of operation are Monday-Friday 5:30am-9:00pm, Saturday 7:00am-5:00pm, and Sunday 9:00am-4:00pm. Facilities include wellness center, weight room, tennis courts, concession area, and meeting rooms.
- North Port Family YMCA is located at 14279 Tamiami Trail in North Port. Hours of operation are Monday-Friday 5:30am-9:00pm, Saturday 7:00am-5:00pm, and Sunday 9:00am-4:00pm. Facilities include an outdoor pool, child development center, meeting rooms, and tennis courts.
- Bayfront Center, YMCA is located at 750 W. Retta Esplanade in Punta Gorda. Hours vary throughout the year. Facilities include a 4,000-square-foot multipurpose room, large kitchen, and tables and chairs for up to 200 guests. The facility is available for rentals for weddings, meetings, reunions, etc. Sailing lessons are available at this location on Saturdays between 9:00am and 2:00 pm.
- Dotzler YMCA Outdoor Center is located at 22801 Bayshore Drive in Port Charlotte. This is an outdoor camp area that includes a rope course and camp buildings. The hours of operation vary. Sumer camps are held for 11 weeks June through August.
- Soccer programs are offered for youth by the Y at Atwater Elementary School and for adults at North Charlotte Regional Park.

*Boys and Girls Club of Charlotte County.* The mission of the Boys and Girls Club is to "enable all young people, especially those who need us most, to reach their full potential as productive, caring, responsible citizens." The following are local clubs:

- Family Services Center: Port Charlotte Unit is located at 21450 Gibraltar Drive, Port Charlotte.
- Punta Gorda Middle School AM program only is located at 825 Carmalita Street, Punta Gorda.
- Port Charlotte Middle School AM & PM Program is located at 23000 Midway Boulevard, Port Charlotte.
- Murdock Middle School AM & PM Program is located at 17325 Mariner Way, Port Charlotte.
- L.A. Ainger Middle School @ Tiffany Square is located at 245 Cougar Way, Rotonda West.
- Tiffany Square Englewood BGC (Myakka River, Vineland, Englewood Elementary) is located at 2828 S McCall Road, Englewood.

#### 1.4.5 Opportunities for Collaboration

The following identifies potential opportunities to collaborate to provide or enhance recreational facilities and programs.

*City of Punta Gorda.* In discussions with staff of both the City and the County, the following were identified:

- Continue participation at South County Gateway meetings.
- Where appropriate assist in the development of the Harborwalk, Linear Park, and the U.S. 41 multipurpose recreational trail.

*FDEP.* The following were identified by FDEP park staff as potential collaboration with Charlotte County:

- Blueways identification and coordination
- Sunrise Waterway nature trail
- Tippecanoe East nature trail with possible parking area

- Cattle Dock Point boat ramps, parking, and primitive camping
- Additional access point and trails at Charlotte Harbor Preserve State Park through the mining area south of Robin Road.
- Biking and equestrian trails between environmental areas.
- Additional active recreation at GC Herring Park
- Addition of a kayak launch in the Links Lane Cape Haze Neighborhood
- Kayak concessions at Don Pedro State Park
- Educational and eco-tourism programs

*South Florida Water Management District.* Work with the SFWMD to increase access to the Charlotte Harbor Preserve State Park.

*Florida Department of Transportation.* Work with FDOT to develop bicycle and pedestrian facilities, including multi-purpose trails.

*YMCA.* Continue to partner with the Charlotte County YMCA for recreational programming and co-location of facilities.

*Boys and Girls Club of Charlotte County.* Continue to partner with the Boys and Girls Club to provide after schools and summer programs for youth and teens.

#### 1.4.6 Level of Service

The Needs Assessment looked at different methods for measuring Level of Service (LOS), including acreage-based and amenity-based comparisons. Acreage-based systems generally only reveal part of the park service provision. At the same time, pure amenity-based systems do not provide enough data normed across the population, such as the amount and distribution of greenspace or open space lands. In looking at LOS, the following were evaluated.

*Prior to 2012 and the adoption of the current point LOS system.* Environmental parklands LOS was set for 4 acres per 1,000 population. Based on the 2012 population projection of 176,217 (includes baseline population of 160,602 and seasonal population of 15,615), the current environmental

lands acreage of 4,337.50 exceeds the minimum acreage LOS requirement by 3,632.63 acres. This results in an actual acreage LOS of more than 24.6 acres per 1,000.

Active parkland LOS was calculated based on acreage found in regional, community, special purpose, and neighborhood parks that have a balance of active and passive elements. The County's active LOS was set at 6 acres per 1,000. Based on the 2012 population projection of 176,217 (includes baseline population of 160,602 and seasonal population of 15,615), if this LOS was still used, there would be a current deficiency of 74.80 acres. By 2050, if no new active parkland is acquired, there would be a deficiency of approximately 570 acres.

**LOS used in calculating Charlotte County's Park Impact Fees.** In May 2014, an impact fee study for parks was completed. In calculating impact fees, LOS is measured in terms of the net capital asset value per resident. For the purposes of planning and tracking, acreage is also evaluated. In calculating park impact fees only community and regional/specialty parks were assessed. Whereas, regional/specialty parks are deemed a countywide asset, community parks impact is calculated based only on unincorporated population, since the City of Punta Gorda is also a recreational provider. Based on this, the 2014 LOS for community parks was 1.57 acre per 1,000 population, and the LOS for regional/specialty parks was 2.86 acres per 1,000. If the current LOS is desired to be maintained, then by 2050, the County would need to acquire and develop at least 160 acres of community parkland and more than 200 acres of regional/specialty parks.

**Current LOS Assessment Tools.** Currently, Charlotte County uses a combined point system. The existing LOS standard is 16 points, as mandated in the Comprehensive Plan. The current point system is calculated as follows in determining the LOS.

Park types are classified as either Active or Environmental. Active parkland includes neighborhood, community, and special purpose facilities, which totaled 936 acres in August 2014. Active parkland is given a factor of 0.3, resulting

in overall points of 280.9. Environmental acreage was calculated as 4,338 and is assigned a factor of 0.1, resulting in a total environmental point number of 433.8. The total countywide parkland points equate to 714.7.

A recreation amenity menu has been developed to document the existing facility countywide inventory (e.g., basketball courts, playgrounds, etc.) Each amenity is assigned point values. The countywide score for that element is determined based on the total number of amenities multiplied by the individual amenity point value (3 baseball fields x 8 = 24 points). When evaluating the scores, the basis for assigning of points per amenity is not clear. For example, a baseball/softball field is given a point value of 8 and a soccer/football field is given a score of 6; yet the soccer/football field actually can serve more people and is available to be used by other sports as a multipurpose facility. When evaluating the list, multipurpose facilities are not accounted for, nor are other facilities such as interpretative facilities or splashpads. Furthermore, playgrounds are lumped in with fitness trails and disc golf, and the size of the playground is not considered.

This system also accounts for population based on points per 1,000 and the distribution of parks (e.g., number and proximity of special purpose parks). This measurement can be somewhat difficult to calculate, as there are three assumptions; if a facility meets all three, a score of 3 is assigned. In August 2014, the total number of parks meeting the distribution criteria was 62. The Needs Assessment Study updated the Charlotte Parks inventory and used that data to estimate current progress towards the LOS standard of 16 points (as mandated in the Comprehensive Plan). In 2012, the system had achieved 18.27 points. Future LOS estimates showed that by 2025, the system would start to fall behind if new facilities are not added to the inventory. The acreage-based LOS comparisons show that the need is largely in the active parkland category.

This LOS process can be cumbersome; however, it does ensure that only parkland that is developed with an adequate level of amenities is counted towards the LOS. This system is sensitive to any

change of recreation amenity, park reclassification, the addition of new facilities, or parks in close proximity to others.

*Current LOS Assessment Point Matrix.* The LOS assessment point matrix updated by FGCU is on the following page. To calculate the final points, the 2012 population, including the seasonal population, was used. Parks with a diminished level of service are not included.

## 1.5 Recreational Trends

The following provides insight to existing and emerging trends throughout the state and nation.

### 1.5.1 FGCU Trends Research

The Needs Assessment Study performed research based on recreational residents and tendencies.

*Florida Residents & Tourists.* Florida residents and tourists shared a similar preference for saltwater beach activities, wildlife viewing, and picnicking. For residents, the list also included bicycling and fishing. Tourists were also interested in swimming in outdoor pools and visiting historical or archeological sites.

*Participation in sporting activities.* The rates of participation and popularity of different sporting activities showed that physical fitness is the most popular of all sport activities, followed by outdoor and individual sports. However, individual sports as a category has decreased by 3.7% since 2008. The sports that have grown include adventure racing and non-traditional/traditional triathlon.

*Participation Demographics.* Trends by age group show that younger groups participate more than older groups. The largest growing demographic is by people ages 25–44. These participants are largely interested in fitness sports.

*Race/Diversity.* Among all races, running, jogging, and trail running was the most popular sport. Fishing, road/mountain/BMX biking, and hiking were also consistently in the top five most popular sports across all ethnicities.

### 1.5.2 National and Emerging Recreational Trends

In addition to the research performed by FGCU, the following are regional and national trends that are to be considered when developing or redeveloping park facilities and programs.

*General Trends.*

- Adults are moving away from team to more individual activities.
- People have less unstructured time, so program lengths should be reduced.
- Activities are moving towards unstructured, individual and drop-in programs.
- There is an increased demand for programs for families, girls, and women.
- Youth participation in traditional team sports have experienced a decline in recent years.
- Increased pressure to open traditional male sports to females such as football.
- Health, wellness, and fitness programs participation levels are up from walking to fitness to therapeutic recreation.
- Increased demand for trails, greenways, and blueways.
- Increased interest in sports, cultural, and eco tourism.
- Tech access such as Wi-Fi is sought out in park settings.
- Active but less impact sports facilities such as pickleball are growing quicker than traditional facilities.
- Multigenerational splashpads and playgrounds provide the opportunity for gatherings of all ages.
- Development of "Paw Parks" that provide the opportunity for dogs to play while promoting social activities for owners are increasing in popularity.
- Increased demand for "extreme activities", especially zip lines, rock climbing, and adventure trips.

Table 1

2012 LOS Points Summary				
Factor	Quantity	Unit	Points per Unit	County-wide Points
<b>Acreage</b>				
Acreage Environmental	4338	ac.	0.1	433.8
Acreage Active*	936	ac.	0.3	280.9
<b>Amenities</b>				
Shuffleboard/Bocci/Horseshoes/Volleyball	55	ea.	0.2	11.0
Single Picnic Shelter	18	ea.	0.5	9.0
Nature Trail/Walking Trail (unpaved)	196	1000 lf	1	196.2
Dock/Boardwalk/Fishing Pier	86	1000 sf	1.5	128.7
Sports Lighting (Court)	24	ea.	2	48.0
Remote Control Car Track/Boat Basin	3	ea.	3	9.0
Skatepark/In-Line Hockey Rink	3	ea.	3	9.0
Multipurpose Trail (paved)	39	1000 l.f.	3	118.1
Environmental and/or Historical Interpretive	10	set	3	30.0
Specialty Garden	4	ea.	3	12.0
Group Pavilions	36	ea.	4	144.0
Sports Lighting (Ballfield)	29	ea.	4	116.0
Paw Park	2	ea.	4	8.0
Canoe/Kayak Launch	10	ea.	4	40.0
Basketball Court/Tennis	48	ea.	5	237.5
Playground/Fitness Trail/Disc Golf	21	ea.	5	105.0
Horse Arena	1	ea.	5	5.0
Restroom	31	ea.	6	186.0
Concession Building	7	ea.	6	42.0
Meeting Room	4	ea.	6	24.0
Soccer Field/Football Field	13	ea.	6	78.0
Baseball Field/Softball	26	ea.	8	208.0
Boat Ramp	15	lane	8	120.0
Environmental/Historical Center	2	ea.	20	40.0
Swimming Pool	3	ea.	25	75.0
Gymnasium/Recreation/Fitness Center	8	ea.	30	240.0
Special Event Venue	2	ea.	40	80.0
<b>Distribution</b>				
Park location follows FLU Policy 4.1.1 neighborhood framework prioritization, OR	62	ea.	3	186
Park is resource-based, OR				
Park contains a Special Purpose Facility				
<b>Total Points, Current (2012)</b>	<b>3220.2</b>			
<b>Population (2012, includes seasonal)</b>	<b>176,217.0</b>			
<b>Points per 1,000 people (existing baseline LOS)</b>	<b>18.3</b>			

- Community gardens, including butterfly gardens, are sprouting across the US.
- Attendance at farmers markets, special events, and cultural events is growing.
- Facilities and recreation centers are being designed and programmed as multipurpose and multigenerational to increase flexibility and reduce overall costs.

*Health and Wellness.* People of all ages, especially older adults, have increased activities to improve their overall health and wellness. It is important to understand that chronic disease such as heart disease, cancer, and stroke result in 7 out of 10 deaths in Americans. Obesity rates of Americans are some of the highest in the world with 1 in 3 adults and 1 and 5 children, and arthritis is the leading cause of disability. Public health professionals are helping to make the case that parks and recreation facilities such as trails, community centers, and playgrounds are key to improving the quality of health. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the percentage of people reporting they are walking has risen to over 62% in 2010.

*Older Adults.* Older Americans' leisure time is increasing and being spent doing physical activities, in educational classes, partaking in adventure travel, and attending sporting events. Older adults are more active and are seeking ways to socialize while getting fit.

*Youth.* Participation in out-of-school activities and programs offer support for youth and working families, and benefit the youth socially, emotionally, and academically.

*Millennials.* For those born between 1988 and 2000, it is important to realize that access to technology and even programs integrating technology is important. They also seek social opportunities with peers, and activities that require minimal effort or shortened time. They also like to stay moving, and enjoy such activities as climbing walls, zip lines, and group bike rides.

*Wildlife and Nature.* Almost 40% of the American population over age 16 participate in outdoor activities including hiking, nature photography, fishing, birding, and hunting.

## 1.6 General Observations

Site visits were made to gain an understanding of general conditions. During the visits the following factors were evaluated:

- Surrounding land use
- Adjacent roadway network
- Connections (i.e., sidewalks, trails)
- Entry signage
- Overall site aesthetics
- Age and distribution of recreation facilities and site amenities
- General condition of facilities
- Use and participation
- Existing vegetation
- Existing infrastructure

During the visits and through additional research, the following observations were made.

*General Lack of Connectivity.* As is the case throughout Charlotte County, the area is lacking in pedestrian and bicycle facilities.

*Lack of Bike Racks.* Very few bike racks were observed. This site furniture is critical to encourage access to the parks other than driving. The highest priority is the provision of bike racks at existing neighborhood and community parks. These parks are usually located within 1 to 2–3 miles from residents. This distance is easy for walking or riding a bike for most residents.

*Overall Maintenance.* The parks appear to be well-maintained. There was very little litter or graffiti observed. This attests to the high maintenance standards employed by the County.

*Lack of Shade at Active Park Sites.* Southwest Florida's heat and sun can be very uncomfortable. There is a need to increase both tree canopy and shade structures over playgrounds, athletic viewing areas, etc.

*Need for Additional All-Inclusive Playground Equipment.* To meet the needs of children of all abilities, the County needs to add more inclusive play apparatuses.

*Overall Aesthetics and Condition of Facilities.* While the County park system is maintained to a minimum level, many of the park sites are looking worn and are beginning to show their age. The County is currently in the process of performing delayed maintenance activities. The delay in these activities was due to funding shortages resulting from the recent economic downturn. It is important to maintain the facilities, including scheduling the replacement of facilities as they become worn.

*Signage.* There is a lack of wayfinding signage to parks, making them difficult to find. Attention is needed to upgrade entrance signage and internal wayfinding signage for larger parks.

## 1.7 Community Engagement

A critical and ongoing part of effectively delivering a community-oriented parks and recreation system is community engagement. For this Parks and Recreation Master Plan update, the County sought input from key stakeholders, county residents, and park visitors, and assembled a Steering Committee to guide the Master Plan update.

### 1.7.1 Steering Committee

The Steering Committee met six times during the planning process. The following is a listing of the agencies/organizations on the Steering Committee.

- Community Service Administration, Park and Recreation Divisions, and Maintenance Staff
- Parks and Recreation Advisory Board
- Charlotte County Office of Economic Development
- Charlotte County School District
- Health Department
- Environmental Groups
  - \* CHEC—Audubon Society
  - \* Lemon Bay Conservancy
- Business Community (Charlotte County Chamber, Punta Gorda Chamber, CDBA)

- 4/H—Extension Service
- Florida Southwestern State College
- Marine Advisory Committee
- MSBU Representatives
- Playground Committee
- United Way
- Youth Sports Council
- Representatives from the Planning Team

Their input and review of the documents were instrumental in preparing this Master Plan. Furthermore, their support of this Master Plan is imperative to implement many of the recommendations, including building financial and operational partnerships.

### 1.7.2 Parks & Recreation Advisory Board

The Charlotte County Parks and Recreation Advisory Board provided direction during the formation of the recommendations contained in this Master Plan.

### 1.7.3 Public Outreach

In May 2015, three public workshops were held to seek information regarding how people currently recreate, their opinions on existing facilities, programs, and services, and how they would like to focus the County's future parks and recreation resources. The workshop participants were also asked for their input on the draft guiding principles, themes, and desired parks and recreation facilities and services. In addition, an on-line survey was posted to seek comments from the public at large. The following are highlights brought forward by the community members that participated in the workshops:

- It appeared the majority of participants were active parks and recreation users. This demonstrates the need for the County to reach out to non-users to increase awareness of the Parks and Recreation Division's facilities, services, and programs.
- A majority seemed to like the vision and strategic direction statement. Based on discussion, there were changes made to



these statements to include economic viability and that the County focus on the development and operation of community, regional (facilities and trails), and environmental parks.

- The public was presented both guiding principles and themes to review and discuss and felt there was duplication with these. Based on this discussion, the planning team consolidated the themes into the guiding principles that are now the foundation of this Master Plan.
- Based on public comment during the workshops and direction from members of the Steering Committee, a "Health and Wellness" principle/theme was added to the guiding documents.
- There was consensus that the County should "take care of what we have" and the focus should first improve and bring up to standard the existing inventory, especially the community, regional, and environmental lands before buying and developing new active parks. Sustainable design and maintenance practices also ranked high.
- The public understood and accepted that mini or small neighborhood parks can be a maintenance burden; and, furthermore, if these properties are not providing recreational or environmental value, at a minimum of a special facility, or at a community level, then these properties should be evaluated for repurposing, expansion or another measure to improve their ability to meet the County's vision or reduce the operational costs.
- The following are facility improvements requested by the public. The full public comment summary is provided in the Appendix of this Master Plan. The comments are organized based on general and specific improvements.

*Additional Infrastructure or General Improvements at Existing Parks*

- ◇ Additional water fountains, restrooms, and parking.

- ◇ Increase shade throughout the parks, including the addition of group pavilions, shade structures over playgrounds, and seating areas for other recreation facilities.
- ◇ Continue court resurfacing program.
- ◇ Add more challenging playgrounds throughout the County that are divided for different age groups.
- ◇ Improve signage within parks, as well as wayfinding to find the parks.

*Athletics and Sports*

- ◇ Design and build competitive tournament facilities for activities such as tennis, pickleball, soccer, and baseball/softball.
- ◇ Need to develop tennis courts in 3–5 court batteries to support USTA tournaments. There was also a request to have doors on both sides of fenced tennis courts for ease of access and league play.
- ◇ Promote regional parks and community centers for tournament play to increase economic impact. The facilities requested to be built at a center or regional park, in a number that could support large tournaments at a single location included softball, tennis, and pickleball.
- ◇ Make the Charlotte Sports Park more available to the public for athletics and other recreational uses. Perhaps expand to provide additional public facilities.
- ◇ Concern regarding the creation of multipurpose courts that were striped for both tennis and pickleball. The importance of creating multipurpose courts in order to expand recreation opportunities on existing County resources was discussed.
- ◇ There were groups at each meeting representing both pickleball and tennis. The tennis players were

concerned they were losing facilities to pickleball, and the pickleball contingent wanted to have more dedicated pickleball courts and/or expanded hours.

- ◇ Suggestions regarding turning the tennis courts at Midway and Sunset into pickleball and keep courts at Franz Ross and Tringali for tennis.

#### *Trails, Water Access and Environmental Lands*

- ◇ Provide regional trails to connect public facilities and neighborhoods, including to State lands and adjoining counties.
- ◇ Add equestrian trails in north county.
- ◇ Add nature and walking trails to North Charlotte Regional Park.
- ◇ Provide trails to the Peace River and Charlotte Harbor—"riverwalks."
- ◇ Create dog-friendly trails.
- ◇ Increase access to the vast waterbodies throughout the County by adding or enhancing launches, blueway trails, and beach access.
- ◇ Provide and promote marked blueway trails.
- ◇ Better promote environmental lands and natural resources to increase eco-tourism.

#### *Improvements to Specific Existing Parks*

- ◇ Implement the master plan for North Charlotte Regional Park.
- ◇ Provide picnic facilities, trails, and interpretative facilities along the Myakka River.
- ◇ Several comments regarding the poor condition of GC Herring Park, including to improve GC Herring to function as a community or regional park, and

improvements to the RC track. There were suggestions regarding the need to move the RC park out of GC Herring to a site with better access to major highways; and, redeveloping the park to provide community recreation.

- ◇ Complete the small boat sailing complex at Port Charlotte Beach.
- ◇ South County Regional Park needs shaded seating and more water fountains.
- ◇ McGuire Park is in need of major redevelopment; look at making this a destination park perhaps with a water feature.
- ◇ Expand Sunrise Park.

#### *Other Requests for Consideration*

- ◇ Climbing walls, zip lines, and other adventure type of sporting activities.
- ◇ Splash playground.
- ◇ Community gardens.
- ◇ Wellness/fitness centers.
- ◇ Create destination parks for special events to increase economic viability.

### *1.8 Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats*

During initial meetings with Charlotte County staff, the Steering Committee, and representatives from the general public, discussions were held regarding the identification of strengths, weakness or challenges, opportunities, and potential threats. The information gained through these discussions was used in creating the Parks and Recreation Division's new vision, strategic direction, guiding principles, and strategies. The following table summarizes the comments evolving from these discussions.

Table 2—Strengths, Opportunities, Weaknesses & Threats

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Variety of programs and facilities</li> <li>• Diverse age range and recreation interests</li> <li>• Community-based park development and redevelopment efforts</li> <li>• Environmental / Green practices</li> <li>• Waterfront access</li> <li>• Athletic parks</li> <li>• Range of species</li> <li>• Amount of preservation land</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attendance measures</li> <li>• Data collection and documentation</li> <li>• Lack of branding and signage</li> <li>• Lack of clear criteria for accepting land</li> <li>• Too many small parks</li> <li>• Gap in experience of maintenance level (entry vs. senior)</li> <li>• Communication between departments</li> <li>• Overall maintenance level</li> <li>• Lack of comparable metrics for how units are evaluated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CAPRA certification</li> <li>• Event-based community</li> <li>• Festival of Community Services</li> <li>• Public transportation to improve parking and accessibility</li> <li>• Technology improvements</li> <li>• Training</li> <li>• Expand volunteer/adopt-a-park programs</li> <li>• Urban Forester</li> <li>• Community meeting space for external programs</li> <li>• Economic development through sports, environmental and cultural tourism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of funding sources for improvements</li> <li>• Geographic size and distance between parks</li> <li>• Inability to terminate “bad” or “non-performing” vendors</li> <li>• Use of contractors limits County’s response to issues</li> </ul>



## Part Two: The Future

This Master Plan provides an update for the Charlotte County 1997 Parks Master Plan and establishes direction and standards for levels of park and recreation services and facilities in the county along with development priorities. The Master Plan describes the funding, political, and administrative processes to make public funding dollars for parks and recreation go further and strengthen the system to meet identified deficiencies and shortfalls in the future parks and recreation system.

### Master Plan Benefits

- ⇒ Ensures public health, welfare and safety of the community.
- ⇒ Assesses the current state of the park and recreation system.
- ⇒ Guides development of park and recreation systems.
- ⇒ Provides foundation for financial priorities and investments.
- ⇒ Develops tools for rational decision-making.
- ⇒ Engages public in identification of issues and solutions.
- ⇒ Coordinates various functions of the County.
- ⇒ Creates feasible actions to translate the guiding principles into actual implementation.

### VISION

We envision an unparalleled, attractive, connected, and sustainable parks and recreation system that focuses on regional and community-based opportunities while preserving environmentally-sensitive resources and enticing residents and visitors to **"Get Up, Get Out, Get Active."**

### STRATEGIC DIRECTION

The Master Plan promotes the development of a diverse yet balanced, high-quality, and integrated parks, recreation, and regional trail system to meet community-wide current and future recreation needs.



#### 2.1 Setting a Strategic Foundation

The following establishes the strategic foundation for which the Master Plan is organized and implementation based.

#### 2.2 Guiding Principles

There are several overarching themes or principles that guide the creation and maintenance of high-quality, safe, accessible, connected, and economically-sustainable parks and recreation systems. These principles form the basis for service excellence in implementing the Master Plan. To execute these guiding principles, objectives and key strategies were developed to assist the Parks and Recreation Divisions in creating and maintaining a high-quality parks and recreation system.

## 2.2 Guiding Principles



### Diversity & Distribution of Inventory & Services

Physical activity and leisure contribute to individual and community health. The County's parks and recreation system will be designed to react to changing trends and meet diverse recreational needs in a safe and age appropriate manner. Emphasis will be on achieving a diverse and regionally-balanced system of community, regional, and environmental parks to accommodate user demand.

#### Objectives:

- Provide a regionally-connected, integrated, and accessible parks and trail system.
- Concentrate efforts and resources on existing and future community, regional, and environmental parks.
- Create a park system that responds to changing recreational needs and trends while addressing the Master Plan's Vision, strategic direction and Guiding Principles.
- Provide user-based and context-appropriate parks, facilities, and programs.

#### Key Strategies:

1. Meet or exceed park level of service, proximity, accessibility, and connectivity standards.
  - A. Ensure the County is maintaining inventory, facilities, and services to meet the level of service requirements for providing developed community, regional, and special parks/facilities (active). Undeveloped property shall not be counted in level of service inventory.
  - B. Ensure the County is maintaining its inventory of environmental lands to meet level of service requirements. Public access will be provided in areas where deemed appropriate while not degrading the natural systems.
  - C. Investigate, identify, and partner with local and regional partners such as the MPO and the State of Florida to develop a regional trail, greenway, and blueway system that provides access to our diverse environmental areas and connects public destinations, activity centers, and neighborhoods.
  - D. Regularly evaluate population densities and development patterns, particularly within the Revitalizing and Maturing Neighborhoods, to determine the need and appropriate distribution of parks and park types.
  - E. Create partnerships to enhance connectivity and safe routes to parks and facilities.
  - F. Ensure the County's parks and facilities are compliant with ADA standards; and, provide the opportunity for people of all abilities to participate in/at the County's recreational facilities and programs.

2. The County will address the existing parks and recreation facilities and environmental lands inventory to meet the vision and strategic direction of providing a quality park system that focuses on providing parks and facilities that are well-maintained, attractive, safe, and meets recreational demand of the community and region.
  - A. Develop a qualitative park program assessment that emphasizes adequate funding for the enhancement, maintenance, and operation of existing facilities and lands over the development of new parks.
  - B. **Given that the County's primary role is to provide community, regional, and environmental lands, and that smaller parks that are scattered throughout the County are a drain on maintenance and operations, the County will conduct an evaluation of the 29 neighborhood parks and the mini-parks to determine if any should be reclassified, repurposed or disposed of.**
  - C. Funding will first be directed to updating, enhancing, and expanding existing park facilities over the development of new facilities.
    - D. Prepare park development plans for existing and new facilities with public input.
    - E. Evaluate the opportunity to develop or redevelop park facilities as multi-purpose or flexible space that can meet the needs of more than one recreational activity (i.e., multipurpose sports fields and courts). This provides access to recreation to more individuals than a single purpose facility. It is noted that tournament play facilities should not be designed as multipurpose.
3. Offer a variety of programs and facilities for all ages and groups, in keeping with current and traditional recreational trends.
  - A. Perform an annual assessment of national, state, and regional recreational trends and determine their applicability in Charlotte County.
  - B. Provide a balance of recreational facilities and activities including special events, youth programs, athletics, and multi-generational programs and facilities.
  - C. Expand outreach and marketing of available parks and recreational facilities and programs to under-represented groups (i.e., youth, young adults, physically challenged, minority, low income, and transportation dependent populations).

## 2.2 Guiding Principles



### Economic Vitality through Parks

The Charlotte County Parks System has the opportunity to stimulate the county's overall economic viability through the provision of quality, well-maintained, and welcoming parks, recreation, and trail facilities and programs and special events that encourage cultural tourism, sports tourism, and eco-tourism. The County's parks and recreation facilities and programs will be fully used to create and improve economic development opportunities.

#### Objectives:

- Create positive community experiences and increase real property values through connected park spaces and environmental systems.
- Promote cultural tourism and eco-tourism through enhanced parks and recreational facilities, special events, and programming.
- Expand recreational facilities at regional parks and community centers to accommodate sports leagues, sporting events, and tournaments to help boost the economy through sports tourism.
- Maintain the quality and integrity of the existing park system to ensure long-term viability of the system and protect County investments.

#### Key Strategies:

1. Evaluate strategies for sound fiscal investments in parks as a cornerstone for economic development.
  - A. Actively market and promote the parks and recreation system to demonstrate parks and recreation facilities as a vital economic development tool.
  - B. Create a regional trail system and improve connectivity to County assets and natural resources to stimulate economic growth opportunities.
  - C. Increase the number and access to tournament quality athletic facilities to facilitate regional, state, and federal sports league events to be held within Charlotte County. These facilities will be located in regional parks or intensely designed recreation parks with easy access to major highways and Interstate 75.
2. Through partnerships, improve parks, facilities, programming, and special events within the County's community redevelopment districts to identify, facilitate, and increase economic development opportunities. Seek out and engage in creative local partnerships and conduct joint fundraising efforts with partners to promote cultural, sports, and eco-tourism opportunities within Charlotte County.

## 2.2 Guiding Principles



### Service Excellence

Providing high-quality programs and facilities yields high-quality experiences and outcomes. The Parks and Recreation Divisions' staff are committed to providing outstanding experiences for all users.

#### Objectives:

- Develop a highly-effective workforce that will positively impact the quality of life for Charlotte County residents and visitors.
- Develop a results-oriented, collaborative, and innovative parks planning process.
- Achieve and maintain agency accreditation through the National Recreation and Parks Association's Commission for Accreditation of Parks and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA).

#### Key Strategies:

1. Develop and implement a plan to eliminate or bridge competency and experience gaps in the County's parks and recreation workforce.
  - A. Create programs for cross-training between existing staff.
  - B. Develop organization performance measures (using common metrics between divisions) by functional areas.
  - C. Develop a five-year staffing plan that also addresses seasonal staff, volunteer program staff, and professional staff (including an urban forester and a partnerships/grants coordinator).
  - D. Identify professional competencies required for each position and review annually and norm the positions to ensure that standards and competencies are similar at like levels to ensure that skills can transfer between divisions or departments.
2. Develop and implement a Communication Plan for the Divisions.
  - A. Develop a process that ensures that the Parks and Recreation Divisions can provide input into the scoping process and contract selection process for needed services.
  - B. Create a performance-based vendor monitoring program to ensure that contract scope and responsibilities are being achieved and to allow for the efficient and expedited termination of non-performing vendors.
  - C. Develop branding and marketing for the entire park system which delivers a message of diversity but unity among the facility types.



## 2.2 Guiding Principles



### Positive Partnerships

Providing a high-quality parks and recreation system for Charlotte County requires constant, collaborative partnerships. The County will facilitate a process that actively fosters partnerships with stakeholders and other service providers to create the most effective and efficient facilities and services possible.

#### Objectives:

- Build community through partnerships that are mutually beneficial.
- Parks and Recreation services shall be promoted and accessible to all community members.
- Use inclusive and transparent community engagement practices that encourage participation by all community members.

#### Key Strategies:

1. Maintain, augment, and further develop strategic alliances with partners and key stakeholders (school board, MPO, Water Management District, State of Florida, City of Punta Gorda, Charlotte County Office of Economic Development, sports associations, youth non-profits, senior agencies, health department, etc.).
  - A. Host regular roundtable discussions with community service providers.
  - B. Monitor and evaluate all partnerships for alignment and consistency with the Master Plan.
2. Create and implement a strategic framework for developing and managing community partnerships.
  - A. Establish partnership standards and guidelines.
  - B. Identify partnership needs and actively seek out partnerships to meet needs.
  - C. Create staff position to coordinate partnerships.
3. Develop relationships with community leaders and organizations.
  - A. Develop and implement an outreach program for key stakeholders and groups.
  - B. Establish regular outreach with similar agency leaders, as well as community leaders.
  - C. Create an Adopt-a-Park and Trails Programs and encourage participation by businesses, social clubs, and civic organizations.
4. Ensure public engagement efforts include outreach to the whole community.
  - A. Conduct an annual user satisfaction and user survey.
  - B. Develop and maintain a comprehensive list of community groups.

- C. Develop and implement a communication outreach plan.
  - D. Evaluate outcomes of outreach efforts to ensure that goals are met.
5. Ensure that services are promoted and accessible to all community members.
- A. Develop an enhanced financial aid or sponsorship program.
  - B. Explore opportunities to promote services to non-English speaking visitors to promote tourism and economic development.

## 2.2 Guiding Principles



### Sustainable Practices

Ensuring an environmentally-, economically-, and socially-sustainable future is an overarching priority for the County. The Parks and Recreation Divisions will serve as a leaders in using and promoting sustainable practices in every aspect of providing parks, facilities, and programs.

#### Objectives:

- Ensure sustainable development that uses natural resources both efficiently and responsibly providing long-term benefits.
- Improve community and regional livability.
- Develop financially sustainable parks, open space areas, and recreational facilities.

#### Key Strategies:

1. Reduce energy demand.
  - A. Replace and use equipment and fixtures with the latest efficiency technology.
  - B. Adopt new modern standards for structures to assure they are as energy efficient as possible. This could include LEED standards of Silver or higher for renovations and Gold or higher for new construction.
  - C. Replace and/or renovate obsolete energy or resource-inefficient infrastructure.
2. Improve vehicle efficiencies and reduce vehicle use.
  - A. The County will evaluate walking and biking facilities available to connect people to parks. If alternative transportation facilities such as sidewalks, bike lanes, and multipurpose paths are connected to parks, then park visitors may choose to leave their car at home. This serves to reduce vehicle use while assisting in meeting health and wellness goals. It is noted, that the Parks and Recreation Divisions are the not the provider of these facilities and will work with other departments such as the County's Public Works Department, the State of Florida and/or the MPO to provide them.
  - B. Bike racks should be available at all neighborhood and community parks since they are considered walk/bike to parks. New park development should consider the installation of electric car charging stations at regional parks.
  - C. Conduct an evaluation of energy consumption of Parks and Recreation Division's fleet vehicles. This evaluation should review and establish baselines and objectives for the following:
    - i. Increasing fuel efficiency
    - ii. Increasing the number of hybrids, plug-in or alternative fuel vehicles
    - iii. Reducing maintenance routes and the potential staging of vehicles. This may be accomplished by creating maintenance zones based on the recreational planning areas.

3. Reduce water use and increase plantings of native species.
  - A. Conduct an evaluation of water usage and track historical and on-going consumption of water at parks and facilities. This evaluation should include landscaping, restrooms, aquatic facilities, and other water uses.
  - B. Implement a native plant policy where native species (80% or greater) will be used in new and renovations of existing landscaping.
  - C. Evaluate opportunities to increase use of compostable materials within landscaped areas (e.g., increased use of leaf mulch, chips, and other waste materials).
  - D. Increase the use of rain gardens, collection of on-site water for irrigation purposes, and increased use of bio-swales for the collection of run-off and stormwater. This should be a requirement during the design of new and redeveloping parks.
  - E. Coordinate with local water treatment facilities to evaluate the use of recycled waste water for irrigation of park landscaping.
4. Implement sustainable building practices and materials.
  - A. Increase the use of pervious surfaces to improve water recharge and reduce stormwater flows, for walkways, parking areas, and other traditional hardscapes.
  - B. Adopt Low Impact Design (LID) guidelines to minimize a site's development footprint and encourage re-use, and where appropriate, removal of existing structures and other impervious surfaces.
  - C. Adapt these LID guidelines for development of recreational landscapes in parks.
5. Develop vibrant and equitable parks.
  - A. Evaluate the current service level of parks, recreational facilities, and open space areas and increase, if necessary, the ratio of park land to County population, particularly in underserved neighborhoods.
6. Evaluate and monitor services and facilities through a life cycle management approach. Annually review research on best practices and local and national trends.
7. Ensure long-term maintenance of parks.
  - A. Develop administrative, fiscal, programmatic resources and financial forecasting to ensure ongoing, long-term maintenance and management of publicly-owned parks and facilities.
  - B. Plan for sustainable site maintenance prior to the development of new or renovated sites.
  - C. Recognize and document sustainability efforts already in use and share accomplishments.
  - D. Support and expand existing private programs dedicated to the care of park systems and encourage the creation private park foundations.

## 2.2 Guiding Principles



### Health and Wellness

The community recognizes that physical activity and leisure contribute to our individual health, and the presence of park and recreation services enhance the quality of health in our community, particularly with the significant rise in the most senior age groups within Charlotte County. Programming should be accessible to all members of the community, especially youth, older adults, and those with low incomes or disabilities.

#### Objectives:

- Emphasize the important and unique strategic direction of the Parks and Recreation Divisions to enhance the public health and wellness of the community.
- Continue the Division's initiative to **"Get Up, Get Out, Get Active."**
- Provide for community members' health and wellness through deliberate and thoughtful design of programs, facilities, parks and services.
- Serve as a facilitator, collaborator, and leader with local organizations in efforts to improve the community's health and wellness.
- Use a life cycle management approach in recreation programming and facility asset management to ensure service provision remains aligned with community interests.
- Park and recreation services and facilities will be accessible to people of all abilities.

#### Key Strategies:

1. Park and recreation services will remain aligned with the public interest in health and wellness.
2. Parks and facilities will be provided to meet and/or exceed proximity standards.
  - A. Partner with the County's Public Works Department and the Charlotte County-Punta Gorda Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) to enhance connectivity and safe routes to parks and schools. This includes the installation and maintenance of sidewalks, bike lanes, and other facilities to **"Get Up, Get Out, Get Active."**
  - B. Review population data to determine distribution by age, gender, income and ethnicity and plan activities at community and regional facilities to provide specific activities that the different groups may be interested in.
  - C. Partner with other agencies and private development to connect parks with residents through sidewalks and bike lanes/paths to promote walking and biking as healthy activities.

3. Analyze community health impacts and develop programs and facilitates to assist individuals in **"getting and staying healthy."**
  - A. Identify "recreation deserts" and prioritize the location of new facilities in these areas.
  - B. Provide programs that provide health and wellness benefits, such as the following:
    - i. Community walking
    - ii. Different types of low impact therapeutic recreation
    - iii. Gardening classes (i.e., vegetable, sensory & therapy)
    - iv. Fitness classes
    - v. Health fairs and festivals
    - vi. Community wellness challenges, and
    - vii. Initiate "Parks are Good Medicine" or "Park Prescriptions" programs with local health professionals.
4. Leverage partnerships with health providers and allied agencies that contribute essential components to the overall health of Charlotte County.
  - A. Coordinate with health care professionals and organizations to develop health measurements for Charlotte County. Link to program objectives.
  - B. Communicate annual data findings to community members and partners.

## Guiding Principles



### Continuous Improvement

The Parks and Recreation Divisions emphasize the continuous improvement of parklands, facilities, and programs through ongoing evaluation and enhancement. To achieve its strategic direction and to continue to improve, the Divisions must have adequate fiscal and management resources to properly enhance, maintain, and operate the parks system.

#### Objectives:

- Require new parks/facilities, improvements to existing parks/facilities, and potential acquisition of park lands advance the vision/strategic direction and are consistent with the objectives of this Master Plan.
- The County will properly fund the Parks and Recreation Divisions to ensure the quality and integrity of the facilities and that programs are maintained.
- Maintain adequate resources by implementing a life-cycle approach.
- Provide a balance of recreational activities including special events, youth programs, athletics, and multi-generational programs and facilities.

#### Key Strategies:

1. Establish and maintain an aesthetically-pleasing, safe, accessible, and connected park system.
  - A. Conduct a qualitative needs assessment of the park system to identify the condition and safety of existing facilities and evaluate connectivity to surrounding areas.
  - B. Identify needed facility and amenity improvements to ensure safety, accessibility, connectivity, and regional integration of the park system.
  - C. Evaluate the potential for repurposing or transitioning parks and recreational facilities that are no longer needed or adequate for other purposes (mini-parks, neighborhood parks, other property).
  - D. Reestablish park design standards to standardize site furniture, colors, and materials.
2. The Parks and Recreation Divisions must be fiscally sustainable to achieve its vision.
  - A. Carry out the improvements outlined in the 2014 Sales Tax Referendum and evaluate options to continue this dedicated funding source for future park improvement projects.
  - B. The County should routinely evaluate the collection of the designated recreation impact fees and its collection to provide funds for future community and regional facilities.
  - C. Develop business plans for facilities and programs, including establishing a framework for consolidating/sunseting programs and evaluating programs that should sunset.
  - D. Develop partnerships with other departments, agencies, and organizations to leverage funds for

3. Provide multi-functional and flexible parks programs and facilities that can accommodate current and future park needs and recreation use trends.
  - A. Emphasize safe and adequate operation and maintenance of existing parks and facilities over development of new parks.
  - B. Ensure new parks or improvements to existing parks are consistent with or advance the objectives of the Master Plan to provide programs and activities to accommodate the recreational needs of all age groups as appropriate.
4. Acquire potential easements/properties to **expand and upgrade the County's park system** and establish a network of greenways and trails that connects parks together. Priority ranking includes:
  - A. Acquisitions that contribute to priority conservation needs.
  - B. Properties possessing the potential for more formal outdoor interpretation of a natural resource message unique to the site or accessible to the local or regional trail system.
  - C. Located within a reasonable travel distance of urban centers, with a particular emphasis on under-served populations.
  - D. Acquisitions that include or offer potential linkages.
5. Create programs and activities for youth, teens, and young adults and appropriately locate them based on their need.
  - A. Consider providing additional facilities or expanding existing facilities for popular outdoor activities for all age groups, appropriately designed to meet their recreational needs.
  - B. Seek opportunities to provide programs and facilities designed for teens and "tweens" (ages 10–12) with structured, supervised activities.
  - C. Develop a social media plan and offer programs and activities that increase youth participation in volunteer programs and encourage youth engagement in the parks and recreation system.
  - D. Provide active recreation opportunities for teens, young adults, and young families, such as Little League, softball, basketball, soccer, disc golf, and other activities.
6. Explore or expand programs and activities which provide opportunities for active lifestyles for older adults.
  - A. Create settings where older adults and youth can interact and "play" with each other safely (e.g., playground within senior center to allow grandparents to play with grandchildren).
  - B. Enhance programs and facilities for older adult athletic activities.



# Part Three: System Building Blocks

This section describes specific actions to achieve the Master Plan vision, strategic direction, and guiding principles described earlier in Part Two.

## 3.1 County's Primary Role—Community and Regional Park Facilities

The Charlotte County Parks and Recreation Division's primary responsibility is to maximize efforts and resources toward providing facilities, services, and programs that can efficiently serve the largest number of people while consolidating resources through community parks, regional parks, special facilities, regional trails, environmental lands, and management areas. New neighborhood or mini-parks are considered secondary in nature.

**Recommendation.** This Master Plan should be formally adopted and integrated into the County's regulatory plans. The revised vision, strategic direction, and strategic framework should be used to guide all decisions when enhancing and expanding services, facilities, programs, and in the operation and management of its facilities.

## 3.2 Park Classifications and Definitions

This Master Plan seeks to mix park elements in such a way as to create a balanced, diversified, and sustainable parks system that is based on, and reacts to, the needs of the end users within their unique geographic context. The Master Plan establishes two tiers of parks for the County: primary parks and secondary parks. **Primary parks** are those parks and facilities for which the County has daily operation and maintenance authority and seeks to be the focus for future development, including regional parks and trails, community parks, specialty facilities/venues, and environmental lands. **Secondary parks** are those parks, including mini-parks and neighborhood parks, that are operated and maintained by the County or an entity other than the County such as neighborhood groups, private development, or non-profit organizations. The following provide refined definitions and criteria for each of the park types based on an assessment of the definitions contained in the *Smart Charlotte 2050 Plan*, the 1995 NRPA *Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines* and existing conditions.

The following definitions are to be used as guidelines for classification, inventory, and development purposes. The key to success when using these criteria is to define what constitutes a developed active park and what constitutes public access or value for environmental lands. The problem in the past with acreage-only LOS measures is that land was placed into inventory regardless of its development or access status.



## Primary

**Community Park (10–50 acres, active)** (Note: *Smart Charlotte 2050 Plan* acreage range is 20–80 acres). Due to their size and scale of amenities, community parks serve a broader purpose than neighborhood parks (definition for neighborhood park is provided under Secondary). Community parks usually serve two or more neighborhoods and populations within ½ to 3 miles of the park. Community parks need to be located, where possible, with direct access to a collector or arterial street and not small local neighborhood streets. This provides greater access from multiple neighborhoods and minimizes neighborhood intrusion. Parks are to be connected to surrounding neighborhoods by sidewalks, and if possible bike facilities to increase community walkability.

Community parks are intended to provide community-based recreational needs while preserving unique landscapes and open spaces. Active and passive activities within a community park are more varied and intensive than neighborhood parks. Community parks have the flexibility of providing both informal/unstructured group sports, as well as formal/structured group sports, (i.e., Little League softball, etc.) but are not suited or intended to be used extensively for programmed adult athletic sports. Parking lots are to be provided, as appropriate, to accommodate user access. Lighting is to be provided for security, safety, and lighting facilities for games and events.

*Multipurpose Facilities to be emphasized at Community Parks.* Recreation facilities at community parks is geared towards multipurpose play to expand recreational access to a variety of experiences. For example instead of tennis courts and pickleball courts, courts can be designed as multipurpose sport courts to provide both. This can be achieved through striping.

**Regional Park (50 acres or more—active)** (Note: *Smart Charlotte 2050 Plan* acreage range is 80+ acres). Generally, the minimum acreage size is 50 acres, but the actual size of the park is dependent upon the space needed to accommodate the desired recreational uses.

Regional parks serve a broader purpose than community parks and are intended to serve the needs of the entire community. Regional parks are to be located in close proximity to major highways to handle large volumes of traffic and accommodate large numbers of people without significant deterioration of the recreation experience or community. Service areas up to 10 miles (or greater in less populated areas) and a 30-minute drive are considered “drive to” parks.

Regional parks usually include heavily-programmed athletic and recreation facilities designed in a complex that can serve for league or tournament play. For example, baseball/softball fields should be provided at minimum in a 4–5 field hub, and tennis courts should be built in 3–5 court batteries with at least 6 courts for tournament play. Many times, special purpose facilities (i.e., recreation centers, aquatic facilities, etc.) are located within regional parks. The multiple use concept for designing sports fields increases access for different athletic participants.

Development of regional parks is usually phased over time with typical features—in addition to competition-level athletic fields with lights—including natural/environmental areas, picnic shelters and playgrounds, nature and multi-use trails, connections to an external trail system, unique facilities (equestrian, dog parks, skate parks, R/C track, disc golf, etc.), and adequate support amenities (parking, restrooms, concessions, etc.) Although regional parks are seen as providing more intense recreation facilities, they should be designed with adequate open space, resource based actives (i.e., picnic, trails, open space) and natural areas.

*Tournament Play and Sports Tourism.* Recreation facilities that are geared for tournament play should be located at regional parks and sports complexes.

*Special Purpose Parks (size varies based on amenities provided at the site).* Special-purpose parks provide the community with a unique purpose. Examples include parks or sub-units of parks that are designated as a natural, historical, or cultural resource, or parks with a singular purpose; such as a park that only hosts a

community recreation center. Special-purpose parks include water access (i.e., ramps, piers, launches), linear parks, splash grounds, or other special facility. Special purpose parks may provide a benefit to groups or organizations rather than the public at large. The size varies depending on use. The service area is 3–10+ miles depending on the location of the park and the facilities provided. Infrastructure to be provided is based on potential use or significance.

*Environmental Lands/Park (size varies based on resource).* These are lands reserved to protect and conserve areas in natural or modified landscapes. They are also suitable for sustainable public recreation and enjoyment for local and regional residents. Environmental lands can be marketed for eco-tourism. Environmental parcels may have sensitive environmental habitats with more urban interface. Management is focused not only on environmental preservation, but also on managing the natural resources for public use. Such uses may include programming, interpretive features, amenities, and multi-use trails (paved and unpaved). Other typical features include birding, canoe/kayak, environmental center, fishing, nature education, nature/walking trail, picnicking, playground, and room rentals. Environmental lands/parks can serve a population within a 20+-mile service radius (30–60 minute drive) based on the size and nature of the site, and the public access/facilities.

*Regional Recreational (Multipurpose) Trail (length depends of destinations/connections).* This is an off-road, usually paved facility that can function as alternative transportation route, but primarily used for recreational biking. Regional trails connect destinations such as neighborhoods to activity centers, regional parks to significant environmental parks, or even connecting municipalities between jurisdictions. Regional recreational trails should be a length that provides a quality experience or ride. Paved widths are to be a minimum 10 feet, with an optimum of 12–15 feet. Although this is listed as a primary facility, it is understood that the County must partner with other agencies such as FDOT, State of Florida, Charlotte County Public Works

Department and the MPO for the funding, development and maintenance of these regional systems. Trailheads with parking and convenience facilities should be provided at termini and major trail entry points. Rest areas can be incorporated throughout the trail length. Recreational trails are usually phased over time.

*Greenway (size varies based on resource).* This is a linear open space established along either a natural corridor, such as a riverfront, natural area 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. Support facilities are usually minimal.

*Blueway (size varies based on resource).* These are marked routes on waterways such as rivers, lakes, canals and coastlines for people using non-motorized boats, kayaks, rafts or canoes with launch points, and marked points of interest. Blueways encourage family recreation, ecological education and preservation of wildlife resources. There is no actual foot path or trailhead, just gently winding waterways. Landside support facilities may include parking, launches, convenience facilities, primitive camping, or even rental/concession opportunities.

## Secondary

*Neighborhood Park (1-10 acres—active)* (Note: *Smart Charlotte 2050 Plan* acreage range is 3–20 acres). A total of 5–10 acres would be considered optimal for the development of a neighborhood park. This park serves neighborhoods within ¼–½ mile without interruption of a collector roadway. Vehicle parking usually is not provided unless there is a need for disabled parking or a specialty element is located there. People should not have to cross non-residential roads or other major physical barriers to access the neighborhood park. Development of a neighborhood park should achieve 50/50 balance of passive and active

(non-programmed) activities. Examples may include the following.

- **Passive:** Internal trails which connect to an external greenway system, picnic/sitting areas, general open space and "people-watching" areas
- **Active:** Play structures (playgrounds and tot lots), playfields, courts (tennis, basketball, volley ball and shuffleboard) not designed for formal programmed sports activities, wading pool, skating area, and activity room

**Mini-Park (up to 1 acre in size)** (Note: Smart Charlotte 2050 Plan acreage range is 1–3 acres) Under certain conditions, park areas less than five acres could be considered mini parks. They are used to address limited, isolated or unique recreational needs (such as concentrated populations) and generally serve residential populations within ¼ mile from the park. Accessibility through trails, sidewalks, or low-volume residential streets are important components as they function to increase the use of the parks. Amenities provided in mini parks are modest and may include open space, specialty gardens, scenic views, benches, and shade. For mini parks, the site itself should help guide the physical characteristics of the park. Usually there is no parking on-site, and lighting for security and safety purposes only.

**Recommendation.** Adopt the definitions and use them to guide the enhancement of existing facilities and development of new parks and facilities.

### 3.3 Reclassification of Parks

As stated in the previous section, parks may not fit nicely within acreage ranges. The park's primary function and service area should be evaluated to best see how to properly classify it. After reviewing the Charlotte County parks inventory, as prepared and updated by FGCU, the listing of parks open to the public on the County's website, and through observations, the following parks should be reclassified:

Parks for Reclassification from Community Park to Regional Park

- Harold Avenue Park—41.27 acres

Parks for Reclassification from Neighborhood Park to Community Park

- Bissett Park—19.10 acres
- Deep Creek Park—6.09 acres
- GC Herring Park—19.31 acres (remove from limited use status and return to full maintenance when redeveloped)
- Harbor Heights Park—8.20 acres
- Maracaibo Park/Kidspace—11.5 acres
- McGuire Park—4.96

Parks for Reclassification from Neighborhood Park to Special Purpose Park

- Allapatchee Shores Park—0.322 acres
- Learning Garden—1.54 acres
- Ollie's Pond Park—41.18

**Recommendation.** Adopt the changes in classification as presented above.

### 3.4 Neighborhood and Mini-Parks

To refocus the Parks and Recreation Divisions on the provision of larger parks, neighborhood and mini-parks with *limited recreational value* to the community, as a whole, will be considered for reclassification, repurposing, or disposition by transfer to another provider, such as homeowners associations or private non-profit; if one of these options is not available, the property may be evaluated for sale.

Any property slated for disposition by sale should address the impact on the recreational services to nearby residents. Any funds acquired from such transaction should be used to further the County's parks and recreation strategic direction. The following sites were identified in the inventory as having a reduced or no level of service:

- Clark Park—0.526 acres
- Lincoln Park—1.8 acres
- Lister Park—1.44 acres
- Ott Circle Park—1.31 acres
- Price Circle Park—0.41 acres
- Saylers Park—3.01 acres
- Scott Park—0.94 acres
- Severin Park—1.678 acres
- Sharon Circle Park—1.14 acres

**Recommendation.** The parks listed above do not fit into the revised park types and maintenance and development model. The County will make a determination as to how each of these sites will be addressed.

### 3.5 Recreational Planning Areas

To serve the diverse needs of Charlotte County residents, recreational planning areas (RPAs) will be established and tailored to meet each area's land use character (i.e., urban, suburban, rural) and neighborhoods (i.e., revitalizing, maturing, managed, and emerging). The following recommended RPAs are geographical-based and can serve as an organizing factor for the location of maintenance facilities at each regional park to reducing travel time:

**RPA 1—West.** Located between the Gulf of Mexico and the Myakka River, known as Englewood or Cape Haze.

**RPA 2—North.** Located north of the Peace River and the Myakka River. Murdock Village and Port Charlotte are located here.

**RPA 3—South.** Located between the Peace River, Charlotte Harbor and the agricultural/rural area, contains the City of Punta Gorda.

**RPA 4—East.** Located east of the population centers. The area is primarily agricultural/rural area land uses with a newly-developing community of Babcock Ranch.

### 3.6 Service Radii for Park Classifications

As described in the Section 3.2 park classification definitions, each park type has a geographical service radius based on park size and adjacent population. Mini-parks are not assigned a service area due to their small recreational value. Special-purpose parks are assigned a three-mile radius, and regional trails are not assigned a service area since attendance is based on the resource and/or facility, and interested people typically are willing to travel to reach them.

#### RPA 1—West

*Neighborhood Park.* ¼ –½ mile  
*Community Park less than 25 acres.* ½ mile to 1.5 miles  
*Community Park greater than 25 acres.* ½ mile to 3 miles  
*Regional Park.* 3–10 miles or up to a 30-minute drive

#### RPA 2—North

*Neighborhood Park.* ¼ –½ mile  
*Community Park less than 25 acres.* ½ mile to 1.5 miles  
*Community Park greater than 25 acres.* ½ mile to 3 miles  
*Regional Park.* 3–10 miles or up to a 30-minute drive

#### RPA 3—South

*Neighborhood Park.* ¼–½ mile  
*Community Park less than 25 acres.* ½ mile to 1.5 miles  
*Community Park greater than 25 acres.* ½ mile to 3 miles  
*Regional Park.* 3–10 miles or up to a 30-minute drive

#### RPA 4—East

*Neighborhood Park.* ¼–1 mile (neighborhood park is a secondary facility)  
*Community Park less than 25 acres.* ½ mile to 3 miles  
*Community Park greater than 25 acres.* ½ mile to 5 miles  
*Regional Park.* 5–15 miles or a 45-minute drive

### Service Radii Maps for Park Types

The following maps show the service radii at the maximum allowance. When grouped, there appears to be substantial coverage; however, when only community parks are shown, the areas that are not being served via radii can be seen. What cannot be determined by viewing the maps is the level of quality development and facilities that are provided at each park. The areas of the County that have the highest population counts are located in the northeast portion of RPA 1, northwest and northeast section of RPA 2 and the

northern half of RPA 3. Therefore gaps in the service areas, as shown in the maps, show where priority should be given for locating new facilities.

The following maps locate the existing parks by the new classifications identified in the previous section. Parks under construction or planned are not shown. Existing parkland was also verified through the FGCU inventory and the County's website. The maps should be updated as new inventory is added, parks are closed or disposed of, or there is a change in classification.

Figure 3—Service Radii

## Charlotte County Parks

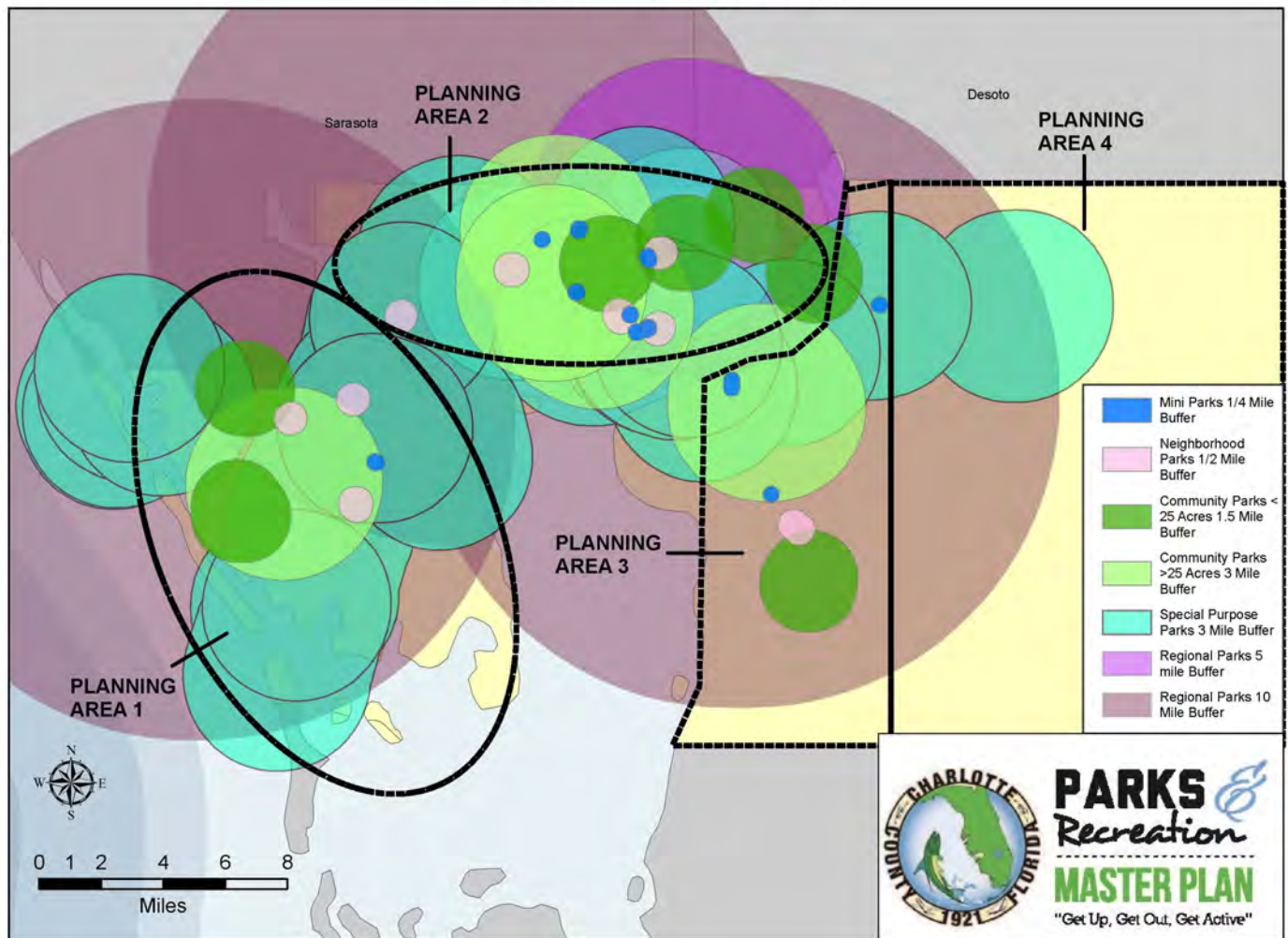


Figure 4—Service Radii Charlotte County Neighborhood Parks

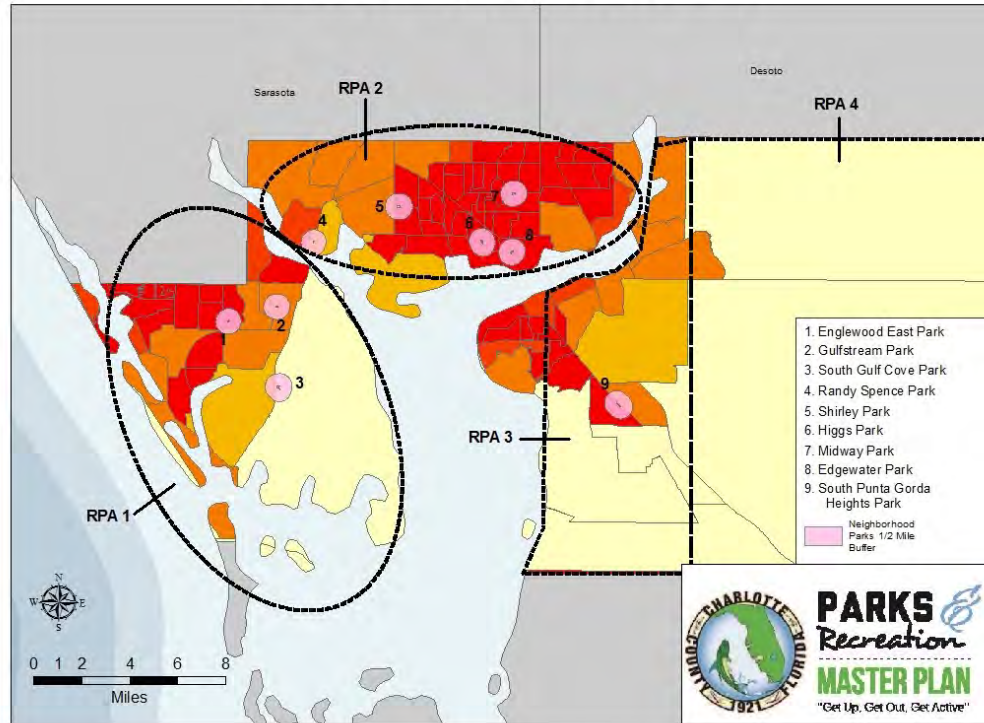


Figure 5—Service Radii Charlotte County Special Purpose Parks

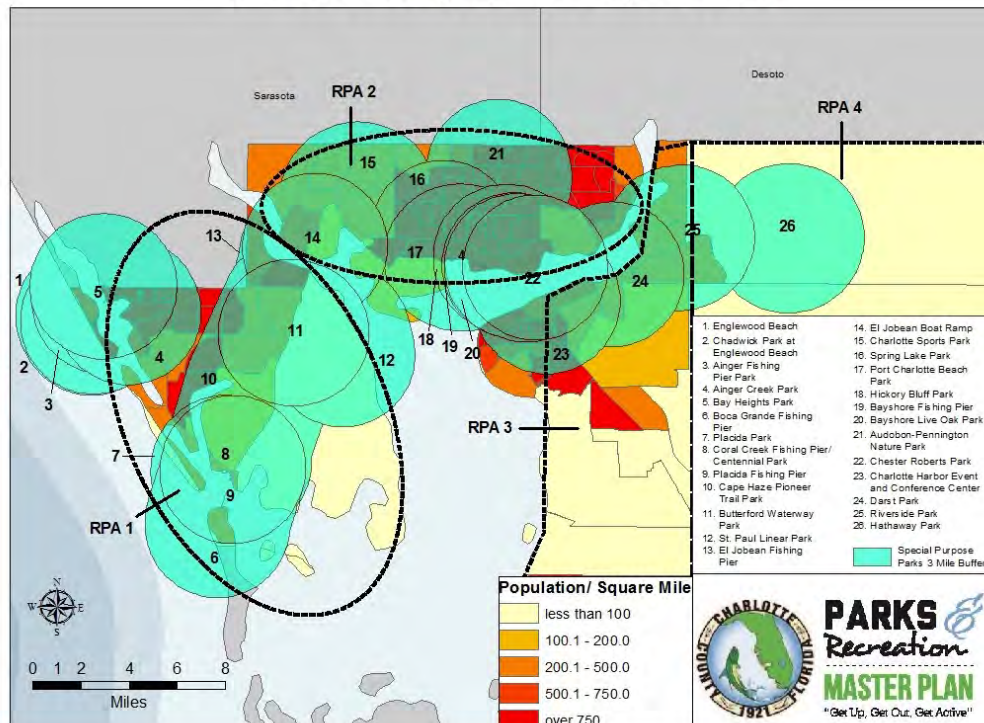


Figure 6—Service Radii Charlotte County Community Parks

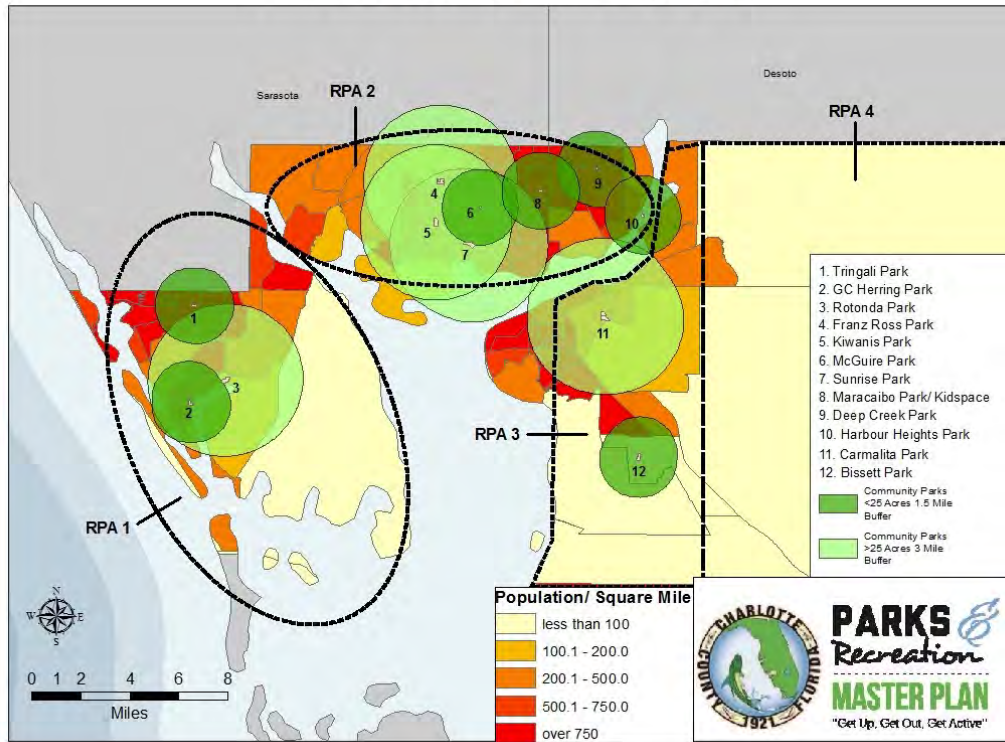
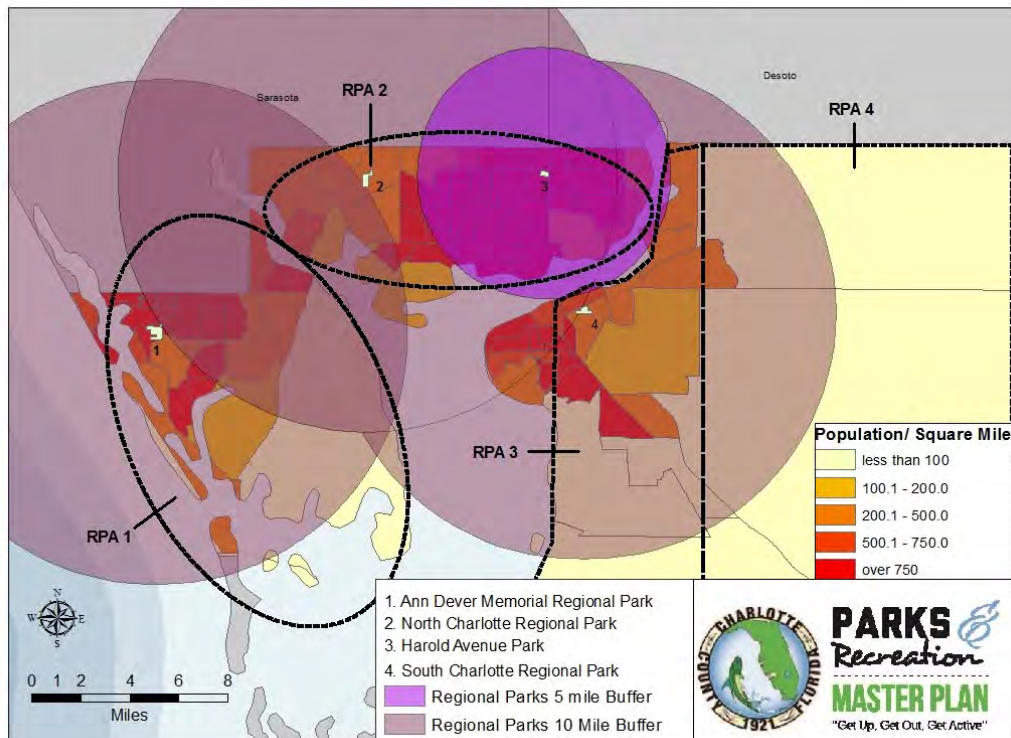


Figure 7—Service Radii Charlotte County Regional Parks





**Recommendation.** Land acquisition, development and maintenance should be organized by RPAs, as discussed in Sections 3.5 and 3.6.

### 3.7 Level of Service

It is important to understand, there is not a "magic formula" that directs an agency on how to plan its parks and recreation system. An agency must evaluate its system based on how well it is servicing the public. One of the best ways to judge this is to ask the public and allow your parks and recreation professionals help guide the future of parks; however, to justify budget requests and defend certain investments, it is necessary to perform a more analytical assessment and compare that to adopted measures and other communities (benchmarking).

One tool available to planners, administrators, and government officials is LOS standards, numerical or service area guides to assist in gauging if an agency's inventory provides a minimum level of service. LOS is determined differently by each community. Tools can include the number of acres of parkland per 1,000 population, acreage requirements by park classification, point structures, and qualitative assessments. As described in Part One, Charlotte County previously used a breakdown of acres for active and environmental lands per 1,000 population; however, in 2010, as part of the Charlotte 2050 Plan, a new point system for active parks was adopted.

#### 3.7.1 Existing Countywide Point System for Active Parkland

The County currently has an LOS of 16 points based on this measure. As discussed in Part One, the LOS is currently being met; however, it will become deficient if park acreage or amenities are *not* added for active facilities by 2025.

The County's system can be confusing and difficult to measure. If the County decides to

maintain this point system, the following changes should be made to the overall point matrix:

- Add community gardens to existing specialty gardens element
- Add multipurpose courts, provide score of 6
- Add multipurpose fields, provide score of 7
- Baseball/softball fields and soccer fields have a similar scope; recommend that each have score of 6
- Add category for splash pads or interactive water feature, recommend score of 10
- Conduct evaluation at park level in addition to countywide
- Separate disc golf from other categories
- Add factor of 0.1 for adaptive play facility or playground
- Add value of 7 for park location if within walking distance (½ mile) from a trail

**Recommendation.** If the County chooses to maintain the existing countywide point system, it should make the above point system changes. To continue to excel, it is recommended that county-wide LOS increase from a score of 16 to 18 by 2025 and to 20 by 2050. The County should perform an annual qualitative/facility assessment and update the parks amenity inventory matrix and LOS points schedule to determine future maintenance and amenity replacement needs.

#### 3.7.2 Qualitative Assessment and Annual Update

A base line qualitative assessment should be conducted at each park or facility. When performing the assessment, the Parks and Recreation Divisions Staff should use a park assessment form (see sample form in Appendix). In completing the form, inspectors should assess the overall condition of each park, including the ambiance. Each facility at the park (i.e., play equipment, bench, water fountain) should be photographed and GIS-located. If possible

denote the age of each facility (i.e., last time court was resurfaced or when play equipment was installed or replaced). To calculate the condition of each park amenity, a qualitative score between 1 and 5, with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent, should be given to each amenity/facility located within each park. If a score is below 2, then that amenity/facility *should not be* counted in the LOS table and scheduled for replacement, removal, or upgrade. The assessment is to be updated annually to reflect any changes or improvements made (if any).

### 3.7.3 Modified Point System for Active Parkland Based on Park Type

As described in the previous section, Charlotte County currently measures LOS based on a countywide calculation of points. The point system allows the County to measure value of facilities instead of solely relying on an acreage measurement, which is often a misleading measure of the quality of the park system. The points approach offers a more realistic measure of facilities provided, but also falsely meets a target level of service that is primarily due to a substantial amount of points coming from larger parks, while smaller parks are providing little substantive support to the level of service or to the public.

To address the *park-by-park level of service*, this Master Plan recommends points based on a combination of the current point award system and the development standards for a park based on type (neighborhood, community, regional). This formula will allow County staff to better direct designers on how and what to provide in each park to maintain a level of service for each park, which, in turn, will assist the County in increasing its level of service in the future. This also addresses the issues highlighted by the community that many of the individual parks were in need of upgrading. The standards provided later in Part Three provide a development menu for each park type. The required facilities are identified (ballfields, pavilions, infrastructure, etc.) for each park type and the individual points are assigned to amenities from the County's LOS matrix. To count the park's acreage into a countywide active

parklands LOS, neighborhood parks must have at least 4 points per acre, community parks 3 points per acre, and regional parks 3.5 points per acre, or plans to reach the necessary points within a two-year period.

Using this method, it may be determined if each park meets or exceeds the projected level of service. Example parks that do not meet this measure include Bissett, Edgewater, GC Herring, Kiwanis, Midway, Carmalita, Sunrise, Rotonda, Franz Ross, Ann Dever Regional Park, North Charlotte Regional Park, and South County Regional Park.

The modified point system is acreage and function based. It adds a second level of measurement to better guide the County in developing parks that serve the community.

**Recommendation.** Adopt the modified point system and assess at the park level. Points determined based on achieving 4 points per acre for neighborhood, 3 points per acre for community parks, and 3.5 point per acre for regional parks. Acreage counts towards countywide active parkland LOS only if the park meets or exceed the per LOS points or there are plans to improve the park within two years. The County will use the modified Parks Inventory LOS Analysis Matrix (see Appendix C) to update its inventory and resulting LOS.

### 3.7.4 Acreage-Based Level of Service

In addition to the point system, the County should consider readopting acreage levels for environment and developed active parklands as a supplemental way to access how well the County is doing in increasing recreational acreage and development opportunities over time. The following are guidelines for acreage based goals.

**Environmental Lands.** In 2012, LOS was 4 acres per 1,000 population. The existing environmental inventory, based on the seasonal 2012 population of 176,217, exceeds this LOS, with 4,337.50 acres of environmental land, resulting in an actual level of service of over 24.6 acres per

1,000, demonstrating that the County currently exceeds the 2012 minimum acreage requirement by 3,632.63 acres. Environmental stewardship is a priority to the residents, therefore there is a recommendation to increase the goal over time.

*Active Parklands.* Active parkland LOS calculations are based on acreage found in regional, community, special-facility, and neighborhood parks. The County's pre-2012 LOS was 6 acres per 1,000. If this standard is used, it would result in a current deficiency of nearly 150 acres; through 2050, there would be a deficiency of 500+ acres. Therefore, it is recommended that the County strive to achieve a goal of 5 acres per 1,000 (see Tables 3 and 4).

**Recommendation.** To continue to enhance the parks and recreation system, establish the acreage goal for environmental lands at 16 acres per thousand; by 2050 increase to 20 acres per thousand. Adopt an acreage goal for active lands of 5 acres per 1,000 and only count the parkland acreage that meets the LOS points for park type (or have plans to bring it up to the required points within 2 years) towards meeting the active parkland acreage.

### 3.8 Improving the Park System

During the site assessment and based on discussions with staff, steering committee, and the public, the County will strive to address each of the following.

#### 3.8.1 Park Improvements

- Continue to take care of deferred maintenance resulting from the recent economic downturn, which includes court resurfacing, playground replacements and upgrades, native or "Florida Friendly" landscapes and upgrading its recreational facilities standards for amenities such as trash receptacles, bike racks, water fountains, and picnic facilities.

- Add more shade facilities including trees, pavilions, and shade structures over playgrounds and sports benches/bleachers.
- Develop and implement an improvement plan for existing water access facilities (i.e., ramps, launches, piers). This should be coordinated with the Florida Sea Grant Boating & Waterways Planning Program.
- Increase the number of accessible trails within parks.
- Work with partners to increase sidewalks and bikeways to the county's parks from surrounding neighborhoods.
- Improve sports/athletic facilities to increase opportunities to host tournaments and league play.
- Evaluate the need to improve parking, where appropriate.
- Design and implement a park signage and wayfinding system that serves as an identifier and branding statement for the Parks and Recreation Divisions.
- Improve site safety and security.

#### 3.8.2 New Parkland & Facilities

To meet future demand, the County will need to expand its land acreage and make improvements to further its strategic direction to provide quality play experiences and provide regional connections through a trails system and to continue to serve as excellent environmental stewards, protecting the County's resources and providing access and environmental education to the community.

Based on an assessment of the gaps in service and population (per sq. mile), it is recommended the County explore the acquisition of community parks in the following areas through 2050. These parks should be designed as state-of-the-art recreation centers with sports fields:

1. South Deep Creek/East Kings Highway
2. South Murdock/West Port Charlotte
3. South Gulf Cove (Partnership)
4. Englewood South/775 area
5. Northwest Port Charlotte/Myakka River

Table 3

**GOAL FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PARKLAND ACREAGE/1000**

	2015	2020	2025	2030	2040	2050
Population	183,493	193,284	203,023	212,706	231,858	250,693
Acreage	4,338.00	4,338.00	4,338.00	4,338.00	4,338.00	4,338.00
Estimated LOS	23.64	22.44	21.37	20.39	18.71	17.30
<b>Recommended LOS</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Acreage (+/-)</b>	<b>1,402.11</b>	<b>1,245.46</b>	<b>683.59</b>	<b>509.29</b>	<b>-299.16</b>	<b>-676.86</b>

Table 4

**GOAL FOR ACTIVE PARKLAND ACREAGE/1000**

	2015	2020	2025	2030	2040	2050
Population	183,493	193,284	203,023	212,706	231,858	250,693
Acreage	936.00	936.00	936.00	936.00	936.00	936.00
Estimated LOS	5.10	4.84	4.61	4.40	4.04	3.73
<b>Recommended LOS</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Acreage (+/-)</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>-30</b>	<b>-79</b>	<b>-128</b>	<b>-223</b>	<b>-317</b>

The southern portion of the county is currently served by the City of Punta Gorda. Bissett Park will provide community-level recreation once it is redeveloped. If there is an opportunity to partner with the City or other agency/organization, the County should evaluate the addition of parkland as long as it is developed based on the criteria in this Master Plan and does not require funding to be diverted from the development of parks in more populated areas.

When seeking new park sites, the County will evaluate parkland opportunities through dedicated parkland (i.e., developers agreement or as identified on the Future Land Use Map and Neighborhood Framework). Property must be a minimum of 10 acres for a community park. There are 7 parcels identified on the County's GIS maps for AGC and GDC properties that are 10 or more acres. These sites are located within RPA 1-West and RPA 2-North. These sites should be evaluated for possible expansion to achieve a 25-acre community park.

*Greenways and Trails.* There are very few opportunities to acquire substantial lands for multipurpose trails that are not associated with State or County roadways, public utilities or state lands. Therefore, it is important for the Parks and Recreation Divisions to work closely with area partners, including Punta Gorda, State of Florida, Water Management District, and the MPO, to identify and secure right-of-way to plan, design, construct, and maintain a viable regional multipurpose trails network. The MPO is currently in process of preparing their long range plan, which will include a trails element.

The County will continue to identify key trail corridors through the completion of a "*greenways and trails master plan.*" The greenways and trails master plan will build from the guiding principles and strategic framework contained in this Master Plan. The County will partner with the agencies identified above in preparing the greenways and trails master plan.

*Environmental Lands and Water Access.* Any addition of environmental lands will be evaluated as the need to protect these valuable resources become apparent. The County will work with the Florida Sea Grant Boating & Waterways Planning Program to evaluate future opportunities to enhance public access to the waterways within Charlotte County.

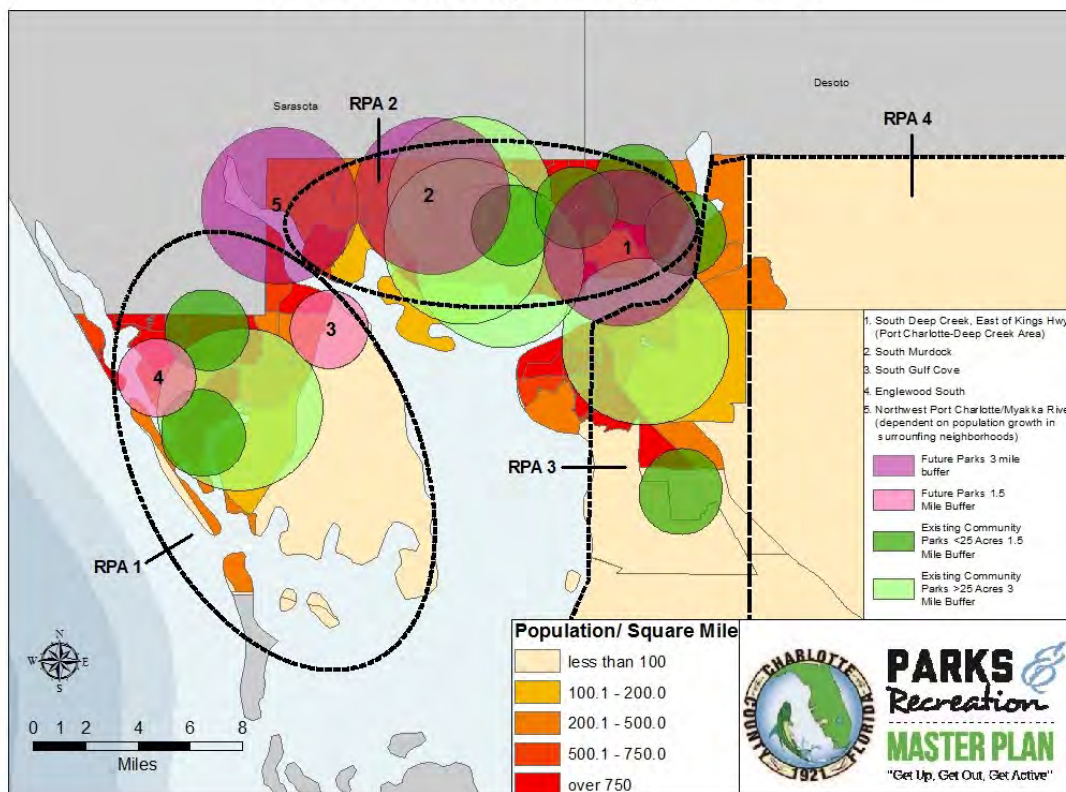
*Park Opportunities Map.* Figure 8 shows the addition of parks, where there are apparent service gaps in areas of concentrated population, for both community and regional parks. Active parks in RPA 4-East are to be provided by the Babcock Independent Improvement District.

### 3.9 Development Standards Based on Park Classification

The following are development standards for each of the active parkland categories or park types, neighborhood, community, and regional. Standards include the recommended size, service area, amenities, accessibility and range of development costs. The ranges are rather large, since the cost to develop parks can vary greatly based on the site conditions, infrastructure needed, and the desired recreational amenities. Service areas shall have 50%+ population threshold to trigger park development.

Figure 8

### Charlotte County Park Opportunities



**Recommendation.** The County will move forward in planning the improvements to existing facilities and in the location of new facilities as identified and discussed in Section 3.8.

### 3.9.1 Neighborhood Parks

Neighborhood parks serve the recreational needs of local residents within walking distance. New neighborhood parks are not intended to be developed and maintained by the County, but the guidelines provided herein can serve as reference for future development within the County or redevelopment of existing neighborhood parks. Each new development shall provide sufficient neighborhood parks to serve their residents. Considerations for sufficient shade is a prime consideration in the design and include the following standards.

**Size.** 1–10 acres, typically 8 acres, but primarily based on population served. 1–2 acres per 1,000 residents.

**Service area.** No greater than ½ mile.

**Accessibility.** All new neighborhood parks must be connected via sidewalks/bike lanes or regional trail access along local streets with these facilities. Parking is not necessary and reduces the amount of space available for recreation opportunities.

**Amenities.** Typical neighborhood parks will provide picnic facilities and neighborhood preferred sport courts. Two types of courts are to be provided to serve a variety of recreation

needs within the neighborhood. Site furniture is also required (i.e., trash cans, water fountains, bike racks, benches).

**Park Acreage LOS Points.** 4 points per acre typical.

**Development Costs.** \$150,000–\$1,000,000 +

### 3.9.2 Community Parks

Community parks serve the recreational needs for multiple neighborhoods and a broader service area than neighborhood parks. The scale of these parks offer more intense recreation facilities, such as lighted fields and courts, while providing a more diverse opportunities to users. They can also be developed partly as a destination, but require multimodal connectivity to serve a broader demographic and user base. Location adjacent to environmental lands can provide additional benefits of shared infrastructure. Park design and function shall include the following standards.

**Size.** 10–50 acres, typically 25 acres. 5–8 acres per 1,000 residents.

**Service area.** 1.5 miles (3 miles for parks over 25 acres).

**Accessibility.** Located along collector or arterial streets with pedestrian and bicycle facilities. Transit (when available) within

Table 5—Neighborhood Parks Development Standards

Activity	Quantity	Space Required (AC)	Total	LOS Pts	Needed Pts
Playground	1	0.2	0.2	5	5
Sport Courts*	4	0.2	0.8	5	20
Multi-purpose Field	1	2	2	7	6
Picnic area w/shelter	2	0.5	1	0.5	1
Open Space**	0.5	8	4	1	1
		<b>Total Acreage (rounded)</b>	<b>8</b>		<b>33</b>

\*At least 2 different types are to be provided

\*\*Open space is ½ park acreage

Table 6—Community Parks Development Standards

Activity	Quantity	Space Required (AC)	Total	LOS Pts	Needed Pts
Playground	2	0.2	0.4	5	10
Sport Court*	5	0.2	1	5	25
Multi-Purpose Field	1	2.5	2.5	7	6
Sport Field	2	3.75	7.5	6	12
Pavilion**	4	0.1	0.4	4	4
Restroom	1	0.1	0.1	6	6
Community Facility	1	0.2	0.2	6	6
Parking^	1	0.4	0.4	N/A	N/A
Open Space^^	0.5	25	12.5	4	4
Trail connector	1	N/A	N/A	3	3
		<b>Total Acreage (rounded)</b>	<b>25</b>		<b>76^^</b>

\* Under 25 acres requires 2 types; over 25 acres requires at least 3 types

\*\* Assumes 1 per 6 acres

^ Assumes 2 cars per acre

^^ Rule of thumb is open space is ½ of park acreage

appropriate walking distances from park entrances. Regional trail facilities must be within close proximity and serve as a primary means in which to connect schools, jobs, and residential uses to the park.

**Amenities.** Typical community parks will provide a variety of uses with a focus on more intense active recreation fields and courts. Parks that are 25 acres or greater must have at least three types of amenities. These parks also serve as gathering place for resident based organizations and include a recreation center or meeting rooms where ad-hoc programming can be handled by outside stakeholders at minimal cost to the County. Site furniture is also required (i.e., trash cans, water fountains, bike racks, benches).

**Park Acreage LOS Points.** 3 points per acre typical.

**Development Costs.** \$250,000–\$8,000,000

### 3.9.3 Regional Parks

Regional Parks are intended to provide large-scale and intense recreation facilities that serve several communities and large areas within at least a three-mile radius (10 is typical). The service area ultimately may depend on geography, community association/designation, and co-location factors. Many regional parks serve as a sports complex with accessory recreation facilities to serve users of multiple age groups on single visits. Many of the activities are programmed either by the County or by community organizations, which includes leagues, tournaments, or special events. Co-location of these facilities adjacent to environmental lands can provide a valuable mix and infrastructure sharing that minimizes impacts.

**Size.** Normally 50+ acres, typically 80–100 or greater. 5-10 acres per 1,000 residents.

**Service area.** 3–10 miles, but depending on each regional park design, may provide county-wide recreation opportunities.

**Accessibility.** Designed to offer access to all ages and physical conditions. Sufficient parking, transit, and regional trail connectivity are vital to handle peak traffic during short periods of organized programming.

**Amenities.** Amenities are based on community demand and LOS needs. These parks are expected to have a concentration of facilities for leagues, tournaments, and organized programming of multiple age groups. Example of activities include adult and youth baseball/softball fields, football/soccer fields, water parks, pool, gymnasium, sport specific regulation courts. The park will serve as the site for regional recreation centers and staffing complex or headquarters. A diverse set of programming and facility types are to be provided, with a focus on large crowd events due to multiple organized games occurring at one time. Site furniture is also required (i.e., trash cans, water

fountains, bike racks, benches). Must meet 3.5 points for amenities to be counted towards LOS.

**Development Costs.** \$2,500,000–\$20,000,000+

### 3.9.4 Multipurpose Trails

Multipurpose trails are primarily off-the-road facilities that can provide a safe and recreational experience while connecting parks and other destinations. As the County and the MPO finalize the MPO's Long Range Plan, the following criteria should be used when planning and designing off-road multipurpose trails.

- Off-road alignment preferred
- Paved surfacing, with asphalt or concrete
- Must be accessible to emergency vehicles or personnel
- Minimum width, 12' where feasible
- Striped surface when approaching intersections or viewing restricted areas

Table 7—Regional Parks Development Standards

Activity	Quantity	Space Required (AC)	Total	LOS Pts	Needed Pts
Playground	2	0.2	0.4	5	10
Sport Court*	7	0.2	1.4	5	35
Multi-Purpose Field	2	2.5	5	7	12
Sport Field*	6	4	24	6	36
Pavilion	6	0.1	0.6	4	24
Restroom	2	0.2	0.4	6	12
Recreation Center	1	2	2	30	30
Aquatic Facility	1	2	2	25	25
Parking**	1	3	3	N/A	N/A
Open Space***	0.5	80	40	1	40
Trails^	1	1.5	1.5	3	17
Lighted Fields	6	N/A	N/A	4	24
Lighted Courts	5	N/A	N/A	2	10
Trail Connector	1	N/A	N/A	5	5
		<b>Total Acreage (rounded)</b>	<b>80</b>		<b>280</b>

\* Most fields and courts are expected to be lit

\*\* Assumes 4 cars per acre

\*\*\* Rule of thumb is that open space is ½ of park acreage

^ Minimum of 1 mile trail (1 mi=1.5 acre) @ 3 points per LF



- Mile markers can be painted on the surface every ½ mile. Many jurisdictions are providing geo-referencing at mile markers to assist emergency personnel in locating individuals in case of emergencies.
- Integrate wayfinding with the Parks and Recreation Divisions' brand and tag line.
- Lighted with solar, if appropriate, for safety or night time use.
- Provide rest areas with seating every ½ mile in urban areas or every 2 miles on distance trails.
- Landscape with native materials and include plenty of shade opportunities.
- Trailheads provide access to comfort stations, contain possible concessions, and parking. There are two types of trailheads, major and minor.

Major Trailhead – located at trail terminus or major entry points.

- ◇ Paved parking lot
- ◇ Bike racks
- ◇ Restrooms
- ◇ Water stations
- ◇ Picnic area
- ◇ Pavilions
- ◇ Concessions (optional) for bike rentals, refreshments, bike repair, etc.
- ◇ Emergency phone
- ◇ Playground (optional)
- ◇ Signage
- ◇ Interpretive kiosks
- ◇ Place for special events or areas for staging large bike rides or walking events.

Minor Trailheads – located where trail users access the trail and rest, etc. These areas may not provide parking as they tend to be located in existing parks or at other public facilities where shared parking is available. These normally include the following:

- ◇ Picnic shelters or small shaded shelters with a bench
- ◇ Seating areas
- ◇ Trail maps

- ◇ Bike racks
- ◇ Emergency phone

*Development Costs.* Trails are estimated at \$500,000+ per mile, outside parks. Multipurpose trails inside parks are estimated at \$100,000 per mile. Major trailheads are estimated at \$100,000–\$200,000+, and minor trailheads are estimated at \$50,000–\$100,000+.

### 3.9.5 Environmental Parklands

There are no specific development standards for environmental lands since these parks usually are acquired to preserve and protect sensitive or endangered natural resources; however, for environmental lands to be counted within the park system, a portion of the site must be open to the public at least on a seasonal basis. Facilities that may be located in environmental parks include a small parking area (may be unpaved), interpretative signage and/or exhibits to support environmental education initiatives, restrooms or comfort stations, user amenities (trash can, bike racks, picnic table or pavilions based on the size and public access) trails if appropriate, and water access facilities such as launches, ramps, piers for those sites that have safe access to the County's waterways. Preserving and restoring 100-year flood plains, for example, can serve both as recreational opportunity and a public safety effort. Primitive camping may be a consideration as long as there is a "leave no trace" policy.

### 3.9.6 Community Gardens

Community gardens provide the opportunity to participate in one of the most popular leisure activities, gardening, and also increase access to fresh produce. Partnering is with health, extension service, 4H, or other organizations to plan, implement and support maintenance of a membership based community gardens in the west, north, and south planning areas. There is a very successful community garden located at South County Regional Park; other potential locations are at Ann Dever Regional Park, Tringali Park, and at the Learning Garden Park in the west and Franz Ross Park and the North Charlotte Regional Park in the north. Since the YMCA is located at Franz Ross, there may be a strong opportunity to partner with them to develop a

community garden. Costs for specialty gardens vary from \$10,000 to \$50,000, depending on the size, features, and the participation by members.

### 3.9.7 Safe and Accessible Facilities

It is important that Charlotte County's parks and recreation facilities be developed, maintained, and operated in a manner that evokes a safe, accessible, and positive image. To achieve this, the following is recommended.

- Facilities must be accessible to people of all abilities. The County is in the process of performing an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) assessment and working on its facilities ADA transition plan.
- Development, maintenance, and management standards should be adopted and implemented for individual parks, trails, and environmental lands.
- Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) methods, programs, and techniques should be employed in the design and management of facilities. Facilities are to be designed and programs structured to allow for barrier-free, equal access for people of different abilities.

**Recommendation.** The County will follow the development standards and guidelines included in Section 3.9 when developing or redeveloping park facilities.

### 3.10 Private Development

New neighborhood parks are viewed primarily as the responsibility of private development, special districts, and municipalities; as such, they should be dedicated, developed, and maintained as prescribed in the County's land development code. Private development should follow the development standards as referenced in the previous section when developing parks. When new private parks are developed, the Parks and Recreation Divisions will review the development and management plans for compliance as part of the development review process. In addition to following the development menu, a viable plan

must be submitted that serves to fund the construction and the *long-term maintenance* of each facility.

**Recommendation.** The County will review private development plans for compliance with the park facility development standards contained in Section 3.9.

### 3.11 Babcock Ranch Community

Located in RPA 4-East, the Babcock Ranch Community Independent Special District is a 17,000-acre planned development with the ultimate build-out to sustain up to 45,000 residents (17,870 households), comprising four villages and five hamlets. The plans are for the District to develop and partially develop the following park facilities.

- 11 Mini Parks, total of 19.5
- 7 Neighborhood Parks, total of 58.4 acres
- 1 Community Park, 77.9 acres
- 1 Regional Park, 100 acres

The Parks and Recreation Divisions needs to actively discuss the plans for parks development and management for the Town of Babcock. The number and quality of these parks is a very large investment and equates to almost a third of the County's existing active inventory.

### 3.12 Acquisition & Park Siting Criteria

Land acquisition will be required to achieve the LOS standards and goals. All acquisitions (purchase, donations, etc.) must meet the vision, strategic direction, and primary role of the County. Prior to acquiring land, by purchase or other means, the County will make sure that the following criteria are addressed.

#### 3.12.1 Active Parkland

- Priority will to be given to acquiring parkland in areas that are not currently being served, or to expand existing parks to increase the recreation potential and public access.

- Acquire parcels large enough to meet future land acquisition needs (minimum 20 acres for a community park; 50 acres for regional park, 80–100+ acres preferred).
- Consider the expansion of existing parks (under 20 acres) to increase access to recreational experiences.
- The County will evaluate parkland opportunities through dedicated parkland (i.e., developers agreement or as identified, the Future Land Use Map and Neighborhood Framework). Property shall be a minimum of 10 acres for a community park. There are 7 parcels identified on the County's GIS maps for AGC and GDC properties that are 10 or more acres. These sites are located within RPA 1-West and RPA 2-North near areas of future need as discussed in Section 3.8.2. These sites should be evaluated for possible expansion to achieve a 25 acre community park.
- New parkland acquisition will have access to the street network through collectors or arterials. Park access requiring pass-through vehicular traffic in neighborhoods should be avoided.
- Consider locating new parks adjacent to other community facilities, such as schools, libraries, etc.
- The County will not accept the donation of parkland unless it contains at least 10 acres of uplands and meets the development standards provided in Section 3.9.
- When siting a new park, the County should evaluate the location of private and municipal parks and facilities located nearby, so not to duplicate services, but expand the public access to recreation.

### 3.12.2 Environmental Land and Water Access

- Prioritize the acquisition of lands to increase public access to waterways or other natural resources.
- The County will work with the Florida Sea Grant Boating & Waterways Planning

Program to evaluate future opportunities to enhance public access to the waterways within Charlotte County.

- Lands must have the ability to support public access, including parking.
- Management plans should be prepared for all environmental lands to determine impact to operations and identify public access and use opportunities.
- Promote partnerships with other local, state, or national agencies to preserve and protect natural resources.
- Lands must preserve/protect significant natural resources, or protect those lands from development encroachment.

### 3.12.3 Regional Trails

As stated in previous sections of this Master Plan, there are limited opportunities to develop regional multipurpose trails that are fully off-road facilities.

The County will continue to identify key trail corridors through the completion of a "**greenways and trails master plan.**" This master plan will build from the guiding principles and strategic framework contained in this Master Plan. The Parks and Recreation Divisions will work with the MPO in implementing trails that provide recreational value that are identified in the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan and the MPO's Long Range Transportation Plan. In addition, they will work with the State and other environmental agencies to create greenways that can support an off-road multipurpose trail corridor, without negatively impacting the underlying natural resource.

The matrix on the following page (Table 8) includes criteria and possible ranking points for allocating funds for trail development. Potential trails should receive a score of 10 or more to be placed on the County's implementation list. The matrix is to be reviewed and updated on an annual basis.

## 3.13 Programs & Activities

Table 8

Regional Trail Priority Matrix	
Evaluation Criteria	
Corridor/Trail Connects Parks, Special Purpose, Environmental Lands or Other Destinations*	
3 points if connects 3 or more public destinations, 2 points if at least 2, 1 point for at least 1	
Corridor Length to Support Recreational Ride	
3 points if more than 5 miles, 2 points if 3–5 miles, 1 point for 1–3 miles, 0 if less than 1 mile	
Extends Existing Trail	
3 points if more than 3 miles, 2 points if 2 miles, 1 point for 1 mile, 0 points for less than 1 mile, unless connects 2 parts of trail, then receives 2	
Connects Neighborhoods	
3 points if connects 3 or more neighborhoods, 2 points if 2 neighborhoods, 1 point if connects neighborhood to a community or regional park or special-purpose park trail	
Method of Acquisition	
3 points if donated or within ROW**, 2 points if corridor consists of at least half of trail that is donated or within ROW, 1 point if at least a third of corridor is within ROW or donated, 0 for full purchase	
Connects Environmental Areas (Greenway)	
For 2 more environmental areas, receive 3 points if connects 2 or more with acreage over 200, 2 points for 100–200 acres, 1 point for sites 50–100 acres, 0 points for less than 2 sites less than 50	
Development Costs	
3 points if funded by another agency or grant program, 2 points equal partnership for costs, 1 point for full costs borne by Parks & Recreation Divisions	
Management Costs	
3 points if funded by another agency/group, 2 points for equal partnership for management, 1 point for full costs borne by Parks & Recreation Divisions	
Corridor is Identified in MPO's LRP***, Bike/Ped Master Plan or other document	
3 points if corridor is identified by government/agency plan	
Total Minimum Points to be Considered for Implementation – 12	

\*Employment areas, shopping, governmental centers, etc.

\*\* ROW – Right-of-Way

\*\*\*LRP – Long Range Plan

**Recommendation.** The County will follow the land acquisition and location criteria as outlined in Section 3.12.

Park programs are the planned activities that provide instruction, socialization, competition, and learning to a wide range of residents and visitors. Parks and recreational programming is a cornerstone for societal strength and diversity in our nation. Its importance is not to be overlooked in the value that it brings to a community.

The County has done an excellent job of offering a diverse range of programming opportunities. Unlike other counties in the region, Charlotte County has been primarily a facility provider; other community groups and non-profits have carried out programming. The examples include football, baseball (i.e. Little League), adult softball, and other similar recreation programs that are being managed and carried out by others. The Charlotte County Community Services' Guide lists the following recreational programs and leagues:

- (ages 11–16)
- Basketball (adult and youth)
- Bocce/Aquatics for Fitness
- Baseball
- Cycling
- Dance
- Equestrian
- Football/Cheerleading
- Gardening (bonsai/community, etc.)
- Inline Hockey
- Martial Arts
- Radio Control Racing
- Soccer
- Softball
- Special Events
- Swimming (lessons, water safety)
- Tennis, Pickleball, Table Tennis, Volleyball
- Youth and Family Programming

During outreach events for the Master Plan, the public indicated that they supported the use of user fees, identifying an acceptable level of program income. For adult programming, it is the norm to try to recover 100% of costs, whereas many youth programs may have a lesser acceptable recovery rate or offer program scholarships for children whose families can demonstrate economic hardship. Based on available data, it

appears the County is recovering more than 100% of total costs expended under Recreation.

In reviewing available data, it was difficult to properly evaluate the effectiveness and success of an individual program. It is important for the County to track program attendance and cost recovery. This information should be inputted into PRORAGIS. When a program is developed, the program capacity, or the number of participants that the program is designed for, is to be established. A typical standard to determine if your program should be revamped or eliminated is if participation levels are below 70% for a duration of time.

*Recommendation.* The County will maintain and enhance the current citizen/grass roots and community based organization programming approach. Their focus will be to partner and provide facilities and support services where appropriate. To properly evaluate program effectiveness, the County will track attendance and cost recovery data and perform annual program reviews of all providers. Based on demographics, public comments and emerging trends, the County will focus its efforts on offering the following types of programs at their facilities:

- Aquatics
- Active Adult and Senior Programs
- Athletics and League Play
- Environmental Education
- Fitness and Wellness
- Recreational Based Tourism
- Therapeutic Recreation
- Youth/Teen Development and Sports
- Water Sports

# Part Four: Plan Implementation

## 4.1 Setting Priorities

This Master Plan presents a new vision, strategic direction, and guiding principles to maintain and enhance the level of service and quality of leisure experiences provided by the Parks and Recreation Divisions. To achieve these, the County must realize and commit to fund the system over time. The aforementioned guiding documents present the philosophy for the Parks and Recreation Divisions. To achieve these, an emphasis must be placed on providing quality regional, community, and special purpose facilities. Existing neighborhood parks should be upgraded as facilities need to be replaced. New neighborhood parks should be developed only if there is a funding partnership with other providers/agencies. The following considerations were used in identifying and prioritizing the projects included in this Part Four.

Table 9

Needs and Priorities	Demographics	Site Review	Public Input	PRAB/Steering Committee	LOS-Facilities	LOS-Acreage	LOS-by Park Classification	Use/Programs
Reclassify/Repurpose Park Sites		*		*		*	*	*
Upgrade Existing Facilities		*	*	*			*	*
Provide Additional Multipurpose Facilities	*	*	*	*	*		*	*
Enhance Shade & Native Vegetation		*	*	*				*
Increase Outdoor Gathering Areas		*	*	*	*		*	*
Upgrade & Shade Playgrounds		*	*	*	*			*
Identify Opportunities for Destination Parks		*	*	*			*	*
Increase Sports Tourism Facilities & Programs		*	*	*			*	*
Health & Wellness Focus	*		*	*	*			*
Increase Access to Pickleball & Tennis Courts	*	*	*	*	*		*	*
Provide New Parks near Higher Population	*		*	*	*	*	*	*
Provide Tournament Level Sports Facilities			*	*	*		*	*
Protect Natural Resources & Increase Education		*	*	*		*	*	*
Improve Water Access Opportunities	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Paw Parks	*		*	*	*			*
Splash Pads			*	*	*		*	*
Improve Connectivity to Parks through Sidewalks & Better Signage	*	*	*	*			*	
Regional Trails to Connect People to Parks	*		*	*	*		*	

## 4.2 Plan Priorities

During the planning process, the public was clear with a message to first **"take care of what we have, upgrading the recreational experience and improving connectivity."** Upgrading existing facilities and implementing existing park master plans and projects identified in the sales tax initiative are the highest priority.

The projects identified in Section 4.3 are recommended for implementation. To assist in prioritizing the expenditures, the projects fall under short-term (2016–2021), mid-term (2022–2033), and long term (2034–2050) planning periods. In addition, annual appropriations are identified to maintain and upgrade the County's existing recreation assets. For example, funds for playground and equipment upgrades, court resurfacing and equipment upgrades, sports field refurbishment and equipment replacement, aquatic facility maintenance and refurbishing, and building materials (roof, AC, etc.) and equipment upgrades are to be included in each fiscal year's budget.

## 4.3 Implementation Schedule

The projects identified are general in nature and are to be planned based on community input and recreational needs at the time of development. The costs provided in this section are for budgeting purposes only and considered to be an order-of-magnitude level.

Operational impact costs for the following projects, other than the sales tax initiative projects, are calculated based on a factor of 3–5% of development costs. Operational costs are not compounded over time, since it is unclear as to the year they will be implemented (are counted only once). It is assumed that the impacts at the end of the period, if all projects, are operational. These dollars would then be added to the budget and then the next planning period added to that. All expenses are expressed in 2015 dollars and will need to be adjusted accordingly as time progresses.

### 4.3.1 Short-term (2016–2021)

1. *Sales Tax Initiative.* The parks and quality-of-life improvements funded through the current sales tax initiative are the highest implementation priority, unless there is an immediate maintenance or safety issue that needs to be addressed. There are two funding tiers. The first tier is prioritized to receive the funds generated through the sales tax. If sales tax proceeds exceed estimates or development costs are less than anticipated then projects from the second tier are eligible to receive funds. The current local option sales tax projects include the following.

#### TIER 1

- a. Ann Dever Regional Park, RPA 1-West. Design and construction of a 23,000 sf recreation/fitness center/multi-purpose gym, Oyster Creek pool splash pad, and community garden. *Estimated project cost \$9,036,000, with annual operational impact of \$278,307.*
- b. Oyster Creek Pool Splash Pad, at Ann Dever Regional Park, RPA 1-West. Includes wading pool and play structure to augment existing pool. *Estimated project cost \$260,000, with annual operational impact of \$48,182.*
- c. Harborwalk/Gateway Project Phase 2, RPA 2-North. Phase 2 of this major waterfront destination includes a covered pedestrian gathering area. This is a joint project with the Charlotte Harbor Community Redevelopment Agency. *Estimated project cost \$4,271,279, with annual operational impact of \$34,000.*
- d. McGuire Park Phase 1, RPA 2-North. Includes design and Phase 1 elements. *Phase 1 project costs estimated at \$2,100,000, with annual operational impact of \$54,000.*
- e. Multi-use Trails and On-road Bike Lanes, Countywide. Funds are scheduled to plan, design, and construct 10 miles of multiuse recreational trails and bike lanes through partnerships with the MPO, FDOT, and Public Works. The purpose is to link parks and other linkages. *Estimated project cost \$3,800,000.* To properly plan these facilities, the County will fund and prepare a greenways and trails

master plan. *Estimated costs to prepare plan \$125,000.*

- f. North Charlotte Regional Park Recreation Center, RPA 2-North. Design and build a 30,000 sf recreation center with gym, fitness center, multipurpose room, community garden, and administrative offices for the Community Services Department. *Estimated project cost is \$8,132,000, with an annual operational impact of \$454,753.*
- g. Recreation Center Renovations, Countywide. *Total project costs \$3,543,000, with annual operational impact of \$177,228.*
  - Harold Avenue (RPA 2-North). Additional gym with an arts and crafts classroom. The location proposed for the new gym will impact the tennis courts and playground. The relocation of these courts to another location such as proposed later in this section will allow the construction of the gym, while increasing the number of courts.
  - South County Regional Park (RPA 3-South). Additional multipurpose room and fitness area.
  - Tringali Recreation Center (RPA 1-West). Renovate kitchen in meeting hall, add a multipurpose room and storage area.
- h. Veterans Memorial Park, RPA 1-West. This is being built at GC Herring Park and will include a memorial and presentation areas for veterans. *Estimated project cost \$692,000, with annual operational impact of \$25,011.*

2. Bike Racks. To increase access to parks, and meet health and wellness goals, bike racks are to be installed at each park. The highest priority is the provision of bike racks at existing neighborhood and community parks. All future parks and existing parks that are under design or will be redevelopment will include bike racks, as prescribed in the development standards contained in this Master Plan. The County will start the installation of bike racks in FY 2015-2016 and update as needed. All active parks are to have bike racks by 2018.

3. Signage. Observation and public comments

identified the lack of wayfinding signage to assist in finding Charlotte County parks. In addition, facility signage is to incorporate the Parks and Recreation Divisions' banner or tag line "Get Up, Get Out, Get Active." To achieve this, a signage master plan should be prepared and plan recommendations followed. The budget identified will be update upon completion of the signage master plan.

4. Existing Active Park Redevelopment. "Take Care of What We Have." In addition to the sales tax projects, during this planning period, the County will commence redevelopment activities for the following projects:

- a. GC Herring Park, RPA 1-West. Recommended for reclassification from neighborhood to community based on its size and potential for serving a greater recreational role. Therefore the upgrading of this site is considered to be a high priority for the West Planning Area. In addition, the County is in the process of **designing the Veterans' Memorial at GC Herring Park**, adjacent to the American Legion Building. By creating the Memorial, park visitation is expected to increase, providing the need to update GC Herring Park. GC Herring Park should be redeveloped to include an expanded and shaded themed playground, expanded lake access for recreational purposes such as kayak launch, fishing pier, trails/boardwalk sections, nature viewing platforms and interpretive signage. The RC track can be refurbished into a running/walking track (cushion surface) with a multipurpose field constructed in the center of the track area. To supplement the track, exercise stations in a cluster formation and a climbing wall could be installed. These facilities expand the health and wellness benefits currently offered by the County. The existing basketball court needs to be rebuilt, resurfaced and properly equipped. Site furniture will be upgraded to include bike racks, player's benches in the vicinity of the basketball courts and bleachers or bleacher pads in the vicinity of the track area. Park improvements should be implemented in two phases. The County will apply for grants, such as FRDAP, health and wellness grants from



DCA, and sponsorships from local health professionals to augment general revenue dollars.

- b. Sunrise Community Park, RPA 2-North. Sunrise Community Park was acquired and partially developed by FDEP through an FCT grant. The park is only partially developed according to the existing master plan that was approved by the State. The County is currently in the process of updating this master plan to include a splash pad, recreation courts, expanded picnic area, etc. The County will continue efforts to implement the updated master plan. The following estimates are to be updated once the master plan has been completed. The County should seek funding through grants (FDEP, DCA) and partnerships (neighborhood groups) to augment general revenue dollars.

5. *Parkland Acquisition, Countywide.* Earlier in this Master Plan, areas in the county that lacked access to community parks within a designated service area were identified. During the short-term planning period, the County will start to *identify* potential acquisitions as listed in the following list. Actual acquisition and development of these facilities, other than by a partnership/joint use agreement, are not scheduled until mid and long planning terms; however, if a park site is acquired by means other than purchase, the development of the park site may move ahead of others that requiring the expenditure of funds to acquire. The County will first identify potential parcels designated as parkland in platted development, on the Future Land Use Map and/or Neighborhood Framework to determine if there a minimum 25 acre parcel, or potential to expand a parcel to the minimum acreage through property aggregation.

- South Deep Creek, East of Kings Highway (Port Charlotte–Deep Creek area)
- South Murdock
- South Gulf Cove
- Englewood South
- Northwest Port Charlotte/Myakka River (dependent on population growth in surrounding neighborhoods)

6. *Environmental Parks, Countywide.* The County has several environmental parks that have

management plans. The County will continue to implement these plans. Examples of the parks include Buck Creek Park (added picnic and boardwalks), Cedar Point Environmental Park (environmental center is in need of ADA improvements, in addition to improvements to deck, trail enhancements, additional interpretive signage and photo blinds, etc.), Tippecanoe Environmental Park (nature trail connection to the east), and Charlotte Flatwoods (trail enhancement and observation areas). County is to apply for grants, such as FRDAP, Water Management environmental signage assistance, FCT in addition to funding and development partnerships with local environmental groups to augment general revenue dollars.

7. *Babcock Ranch, RPA 4-East.* The Babcock Ranch development agreement identifies the dedication and development of specific park properties. The infrastructure is currently being installed, and houses are anticipated to break ground in 2016. There are specific thresholds as presented earlier in this Master Plan, which triggers the provision of a regional park, community park and neighborhood parks. The Parks and Recreation Divisions are to work closely with the developers to ensure the 2 community/regional parks, 7 neighborhood parks, and 11 mini-parks meet the minimal standards contained within this Master Plan. If the Parks and Recreation Divisions are to take over the development, operation, and maintenance of the parks facilities, dedicated funding must be identified by the Community and the County. The Parks and Recreation Divisions along with Building Construction Services will review the development as required by the DRI agreement.

The distance between existing County facilities and Babcock will require dedicated staff and equipment for Babcock to meet the maintenance and operational needs of development.

#### 4.3.2 Mid-term (2022–2033)

Since this planning period is a twelve year period, the mid-term planning period has been broken down by six year sub-sets to respond to the County's capital planning process. The ranges are fiscal years (FY) 2022-2027 and FY 2028-2033.

1. *Sales Tax Initiative (FY 2021–2026)*. These parks are identified for implementation in the 2021–2026 time period, in case they are not funded through the 2014-2020 local option sales tax.

##### TIER 2

- a. Cattle Dock Boat Ramp, RPA1-West. New boat ramp on the Charlotte Harbor and Myakka River. The boat ramp facility is planned for a 7-acre site and scheduled to have 2 ramp launch areas, 70 trailer parking spaces, 29 car parking spaces, and restrooms. *Estimated project cost \$4,490,000, with annual operation cost of \$28,671.*
  - b. North Charlotte Regional Park Aquatic Center, RPA 1-West. Competitive pool facility (50 meter X 25 yard). *Estimated project cost \$4,438,000, with annual operational impact of \$421,003.*
  - c. Sailing Center at Port Charlotte Beach, RPA 2-North. Sailing education center, to include a 3,000 sf building with a meeting room and storage area for vessels and program supplies. This is a joint project with the Charlotte Harbor Sailing Center, Inc., Charlotte Harbor Regatta, Charlotte Harbor Yacht Club and Punta Gorda Isles Yacht Club. *Estimated project costs \$918,500 with annual operational impact of \$30,455.*
2. *Signage*. Continue signage program.
3. *Existing Parks*. "Take Care of What We Have." The following park development or redevelopment is recommended.
- a. McGuire Park Phase 2 & 3, RPA 2-North (FY 2022–2027). Phase 1 park improvements were scheduled implementation through the 2014–2020 local option sale tax. The remainder of the proposed park elements are to be completed during this planning period.
  - b. Competition Level Tennis and Pickleball Facility at Maracaibo Park, RPA 2-North (FY 2022–2027). During the public outreach process, there was a vocal request for a tournament level tennis and pickleball facility. In addition, the tennis courts at Harold Avenue Park may be impacted or removed to facilitate the new gym that is included in the short-term planning period. Based on its close proximity to Harold Avenue and Kings Highway and I-75, Maracaibo Park could be redeveloped as this facility. This will require the removal of the three ballfields and related infrastructure. If the competition level court facility is not developed at Maracaibo Park, the County should evaluate the opportunity to add this facility to North Charlotte Regional Park. To secure regional tournaments and facilitate active leagues, it is recommended that the facility be developed to include a minimum of 6 lit tennis courts and 6 lit pickleball. Support facilities are to include shaded staging areas, like associated pavilions, bleachers, player benches, water coolers, and a small building to contain restrooms, small office, storage and concession or vending area.
  - c. GC Herring Park Phase 2, RPA 1-West (FY 2022–2027). Continue to implement the master plan for the site.
  - d. Ann Dever Regional Park Enhancement, RPA A-West (FY 2022–2027). Sidewalks are to be added at each entry way from San Casa Drive. The basketball court adjacent to the skate park usage is questionable. This area could be reserved for future expansion of the skate park or converted to multipurpose courts for tennis/pickle ball or pickleball. If the basketball court remains, it needs to be refurbished. Add a large pavilion in the vicinity of the football field. Since the site includes nature trails, there is an opportunity to create a "wilderness in the park" program. Additional interpretive signs and kiosks would enhance this experience.
  - e. South County Regional Park, RPA 3-South (FY 2022–2027). South County Regional Park does not currently meet the per park facility LOS

standard. In evaluating the site and public comments, there is an opportunity to construct an outdoor pickleball court complex, add a small pavilion with restroom facility near the playground and a walking/fitness path around the large lake area with a pedestrian bridge where the water body constricts. There is an opportunity to partner with the local pickleball group to raise funds for the pickleball courts. Local health professionals may lend support for a wellness walk around the lake.

f. Pavilions in Parks Program (countywide) (FY 2022–2027). There is a need to expand facilities for shaded group activities such as reunions, picnics, and special events in the existing parks. The addition of pavilions in the parks will greatly enhance the opportunities. The Pavilions in Parks Program will assist the Parks and Recreation Divisions in improving existing parks. Pavilions are to be installed in the parks listed below.

- Ann Dever Regional Park (1 large, 2 medium – see previous improvement)
- South County Regional Park (1 large, 2 medium)
- Carmelita Community Park (1–2 large)
- North Charlotte Regional Park (1–2 large)
- Franz Ross Community Park (1 medium)
- Deep Creek Park (1 medium)
- Neighborhood Parks (8 medium pavilions)

g. Placida Park Phase 1, RPA 1-West (FY 2022–2027). The site is a popular boat ramp facility that is divided into two parts by an inlet. The boat ramp area needs aquatic maintenance and additional treatment areas for the water runoff from the boats. During the Master Plan process, a conceptual plan was developed that includes formulized overflow parking, addition of a safe and more convenient pedestrian walkway between the overflow parking area and better access connections between the paved parking lot and the kayak launch area. A better defined kayak launch facility (launch, mooring area, drive, turn around, and support facilities) is needed. The opportunity exists to create a beach area and pier to provide additional access to the water. Native landscape is to be enhanced and

there is an opportunity to include a rain garden and associated signage. A restroom (possible composting type) will better serve this area. The conceptual plan is included in the appendix. There are grant opportunities through the boater improvement program, Water Management District, and FDEP.

Phase 2 (FY 2028–2033). As a second phase to this site, the boat ramp is experiencing washouts due to larger boats than expected using the ramp. This washout will ultimately shorten the life cycle of the boat ramp constructed in 2008. Staff will annually monitor the condition of the ramp, but expect to repair and provide higher maintenance level of service over the next few years, with the ultimate goal of replacement and redesign to accommodate larger boats.

h. Sunrise Community Park Phase 2, RPA 2-North (FY 2022–2027). The County will continue efforts to implement the updated master plan. The following estimates are to be updated once the master plan has been completed. The County should seek funding through grants (FDEP, DCA) and partnerships (neighborhood groups) to augment available funds (sales tax, general revenue).

i. Bissett Park, RPA 3 South (FY 2028–2033). This park is south of the city of Punta Gorda and offers an opportunity to serve a large platted residential area. With nearly 20 acres, it can be developed in accordance with typical community park guidelines and as provided for within this Master Plan. Currently, this park does not meet the necessary LOS point requirement. The population growth in the surrounding neighborhood has been slow, but with proximity to Punta Gorda and Fort Myers, along with existing infrastructure, such as paved roads, serving many of the platted lots, this park offers an opportunity for a serene community park setting. Careful evaluation of the population growth within the area is critical to the timing and budgeting. Improvements appropriate for this site to bring up the LOS points might include trailhead facilities (part of regional bicycle route), conversion of tennis court to multipurpose

courts, additional horseshoe pits, nature trails throughout the 20 acres, environmental and historical interpretive features, fishing pier, multipurpose play field, a 9-hole disc golf course, and a community building with a meeting room. Impact fees may be used to develop this park as a community park, when population growth warrants the expenditures.

- j. Relocation of Allapatchee Shores Park, RPA 2-North (FY 2028–2033). This park is located at the end of a cul-de-sac in a residential neighborhood. It serves as a canoe/kayak launch. In an effort to better promote tourism and use of Charlotte County blueways, the boat launch needs to be evaluated for relocation upstream to the FDOT rest area site, which is under consideration as a tourist and environmental center. That site has sufficient parking and infrastructure to allow greater access and be a significant draw for kayakers from outside of Charlotte County, thereby increasing non-resident financial contributions and purchases. Partnered with a tourist center, potential hotel site, and other amenities, the location of a canoe/kayak launch would enhance the marketing and promotion of that site. If this relocation occurs, the existing Allapatchee Shore Park launch may be maintained, dedicated to the subdivision or repurposed.
- k. Myakka Park, RPA 1-West (FY 2028–2033). Myakka Park is an environmental area. Potential improvements include an entrance with entry sign, small parking area using pervious surface, nature trails and interpretative signage, 4 picnic tables, trash cans, and small pavilion with 2 tables. Potential water access enhancements include a kayak launch and a fishing pier/observation platform. Possibility to work with Scouts or other organization to improve the trails and construct interpretive signage.
- l. Lake Betty Park Redevelopment, RPA 2-North (FY 2028–2033). Lake Betty Park is a neighborhood park just under 4 acres. Based on its location, this park can serve as a special destination park for the surrounding neighborhoods. The park conceptual plan

prepared during the planning process includes a new parking area, specialty rain gardens, dog park, one-third mile walking path with exercise stations, open play areas, expanding fishing pier and boardwalk, relocation of existing play equipment to under the tree canopy, a new teen-oriented play area, and climbing wall.

4. *Environmental Parks, Countywide (FY 2022–2033)*. The County will continue to improve and enhance public access at its environmental parks.

5. *Water Access Improvements, Countywide (FY 2022–2033)*. One area of deficiency, when compared to SCORP, is boater access lanes. Water access is also high on activities for the County's demographics and has been requested by the public. Therefore, the County will, in addition to the improvements improve planned for Cattle Dock Boat Ramp and Placida Park, seek to enhance water access for motorized and non-motorized boat access and for fishing and other water recreation activities. One of the priority areas identified in the Needs Assessment, and by service area, is to locate and build a boat access facility in South County.

The County should follow recommendations contained in the Florida Sea Grant Boating & Waterways Planning Program when siting new access points. The County will first identify partnerships with state agencies for facility locating before acquiring.

6. *Multi-Use Trails and On-road Bike Lanes, Countywide (FY 2022–2033)*. The County will continue its efforts to build a regionally-connected system of trails and biking facilities. During this planning period, the County will consider connecting the Charlotte Sports Park with North Charlotte Regional Park with a multipurpose trail as delineated on the North Charlotte Regional Park Master Plan, in addition (if not funded in previous planning period) the connection between Carmelita Community Park and Airport Road. Another connection is a possible pathway connection South County Regional Park to downtown Punta Gorda and Charlotte High School.

7. *Parkland Acquisition (FY 2022–2027)*. During the first half of the planning period 2022 thru 2033 the priority is to acquire land for community parks in the following areas:

- Southwest Deep Creek, East of Kings Hwy (Port Charlotte-Deep Creek gap)
- South Murdock
- South Gulf Cove (partnership)

South Gulf Cove can be acquired through a partnership. Therefore the identified costs do not include the new park proposed in the South Gulf Cove area.

8. *New Park Development (FY 2028–2033)*. During the second part of the mid-term planning period 2023 through 2035, the priority is to design and develop the following community parks:

- Southwest Deep Creek, East of Kings Highway (Port Charlotte-Deep Creek gap)
- South Murdock

The park development must meet the intent as described under the park development criteria provided earlier in this Master Plan. All parks are to be master planned based on input from the public.

#### 4.3.3 Long-term (2034-2050)

To facilitate planning and the cost of implementation, the following projects have been identified based on two capital planning periods, FY 2034–2039 and 2040–2045+

1. *Multi-Use Trails and On-road Bike Lanes, Countywide*. The County will continue its efforts in building a regionally connected system of trails and biking facilities in each planning period.

2. *Environmental Parks, Countywide*. The County will continue to improve and enhance public access at its environmental parks.

3. *Water Access Improvements, Countywide*. The County will continue its water access improvements.

4. *Park Development, Countywide*. During the planning period 2022 through 2033, the following projects were identified for acquisition.

- South Gulf Cove (FY 34-39 development – land already acquired through partnership)

The park development will meet the intent as described under the park development criteria provided earlier in this Master Plan. All parks are to be master planned based on input from public.

5. *Parkland Acquisition and Development, Countywide*. During the planning period 2034 thru 2050, the priority is to acquire and develop a community park in the following areas.

- Englewood South/775 area (FY 2034–2039 acquire / FY 2034–2039 develop)
- Northwest Port Charlotte/Myakka River (FY 2034–2039 acquire/FY 2040–2045+ develop)

The park development will meet the intent as described under the park development criteria provided earlier in this Master Plan. All parks are to be designed based on input from the public.

#### 4.4 Annual Facility Upgrades (ongoing)

The County has established a series of ongoing facility improvement and maintenance categories for capital dollars. It is critical for the County to continue to fund these on an annual basis to protect the County's resources. Costs have not been developed for these since these are considered on-going maintenance and upgrading programs, and not considered a project specific program. However, current funding levels were recently re-established after several years of delayed maintenance. This has left a backlog of facilities to repair and replace. Delaying and under funding maintenance puts equipment and facilities at-risk of deteriorating quicker than the expected life cycles and ultimately costing more to repair or replace.

#### 4.4.1 Court Resurfacing and Improvement Program

The County has an active resurfacing program. Each court is evaluated for use, condition, etc. In reviewing the criteria used by the Parks and Recreation Divisions, it was apparent there were facilities identified that scored low on participation. These are to be evaluated for repurposing or making them multipurpose courts to support pickleball. If the participation is high, then there may be a need to increase the number of courts. In addition to the court improvements, covered or shaded seating or viewing areas and a water fountain in the vicinity of the courts are to be part of the improvement program. During an inspection, in addition to comments made by the public, the courts at Midway Park are in need of refurbishment or repurposed as basketball courts or pickleball courts.

#### 4.4.2 Playground Improvement Program

Playgrounds are an important element for development and recreational play for youth from tots to tweens. The County has already identified playgrounds for replacement, enhancement and to add shade structures. The County will upgrade surfacing and expand equipment to integrate adult play, inclusive play and fitness facilities/apparatuses. For example, the fitness equipment at Kiwanis Park needs to be replacement within the next three years, and when this is done, consider replacing it with cluster interactive exercise units.

#### 4.4.3 Neighborhood Improvement Program

This Master Plan focuses on community and regional facilities, but the importance of maintaining the current inventory of neighborhood parks is realized. The County will perform an annual inspection to determine when equipment needs to be replaced and if new facilities are desired by the surrounding neighborhood.

For example, *Midway Park* has two underutilized tennis courts and a small parking area. This park does not currently meet the neighborhood site

development criteria, nor the neighborhood LOS for having a variety of recreation amenities. The site has good access and visibility from Midway Boulevard and additional acreage to better serve residents. One idea is to relocate the basketball courts from Harold Avenue to this site and create a small basketball center. Other improvements could include a small pavilion, addition of water fountain and a teen or adventure playground on the other side of the trees.

Another example is *Kiwanis Park*, the opportunity exists to program this park for special events. To increase this activity, additional support facilities need to be installed including electric outlets for vendors, more benches and formal parking. In assessing each neighborhood park, the County is to use the recommended parks LOS worksheet (provided in the appendix).

#### 4.4.4 Landscaping and Site Furniture

The County will establish design standards for its site furniture and commence an annual replacement program as the facilities such as trash cans, benches, picnic tables, etc. need to be replaced. Consider redoing a whole park at a time and schedule accordingly. Many of the parks are in need of additional tree canopy such as Carmalita, Rotunda, Sunrise, Tringali, Ann Dever, South County and Deep Creek.

#### 4.4.5 Building Improvements

The County will continue to fund its building improvements program to maintain its existing facilities. Several of the restrooms, are very well maintained but the age of the buildings are reaching a point where replacement will be needed. The County will develop a restroom replacement program and prioritize based on age, condition, and use.

#### 4.4.6 Blueways and Water Access

The County has an annual program for making substantial improvements to its existing boating and fishing facilities. The County will continue to maintain this program. To enhance public access to the County's waterways, the Parks and Recreation Divisions will use the "Florida Sea

Grant Boating & Waterways Planning Program." In addition, The County will work with Natural Resources and the State and Water Management District, initiate blueways marking program at water trails identified in the blueways guide. In evaluating boating facility improvements, monitor use to determine the need to expand parking or ramp, if deemed not to negatively impact environmental conditions.

#### 4.4.7 Paving and Parking Improvement Program

The County will continue to schedule resurfacing and parking enhancements. The County will consider formal parking at [Kiwaniis Park](#) along Midway Boulevard to support more special events such as music in the park, "Bluegrass on the Green, etc.

#### 4.4.8 Sidewalks to Parks Program

The Parks and Recreation Divisions will work with the County's Public Works Department and private development to improve safe access and improve overall community walkability. While, the Parks and Recreation Divisions are not responsible for sidewalks outside its property, they will make sure that there are internal sidewalks connecting to the outside sidewalks, providing safe entry into the park sites. An annual budget is to be established once the program has been formulated.

## 4.5 Funding the Plan

Charlotte County recognizes the importance of finding and implementing methods of financing park system development, ongoing maintenance, operations and programming in addition to enhancing and expanding its facilities. As demonstrated at the national level, parks and recreation department budgets were hit hard by the recent economic downturn and have yet to rebound to pre 2007 rates. This has caused the old mantra of doing more with less, something recreational professionals have learned to do probably better than any other profession.

### 4.5.1 Repair and Replacement Program

It is estimated that the County has annual capital needs of approximately \$4,000,000 for ongoing improvement projects through 2050.

#### Capital Improvement Policy

Charlotte County has completed a 20-year Capital Needs Assessment (CNA) that identifies capital needs over a 20-year horizon for countywide infrastructure. The CNA will be update during bi-annual budget process. The CNA is not balanced to revenues, but are considered 'potential projects' until they move into the 5-year Capital Improvement Program.

The 5-year CIP forecasts spending during 5-year threshold and is tied to the Comprehensive Plan, Fiscal Planning Process and aligned with established goals of the Board of County Commissioners. The CIP identifies "physical needs" of the County. Each year the projects listed in the CIP are prioritized by committee and submitted to the Board of County Commissioners for approved.

Funding for project ins the CIP will come from gas -tax, utility funds, capital projects funds, sales tax extension funds, debt service funds and impact fees.

Funding for improvements in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan will be submitted as part of the Capital Improvement Policy.

*Extending Sales Tax through 2050.* The County should consider extending the local option sales tax through 2050 to fund the remaining needs of the plan. Promoting the projects implemented through the current sales tax will increase the likelihood that residents will elect to extend the sales tax on the next ballot initiative. Success in implementing the current plan is directly related to voters approving additional funds in the future.

The County must identify additional ways to leverage its dollars and seek alternative measures. The following section discusses alternative measures.

### 4.5.2 Alternative Funding

In addition to increasing its proportional share of

tax revenue through the County's general fund, it must use alternative ways to fund its operations and expansion. The following addresses a few of these measures.

*Impact Fees.* The County has established an impact fee structure to fund the acquisition and development of its active parks through impact fees. The impact structure is currently approved for collection at 30%. Future adjustments based on inflation or other Board adopted changes would supplement revenue.

*User Fees.* The County will continue to implement a user fee structure to provide programming, especially to adult and organized play, in addition for facility rentals. There was a strong feeling during the public outreach that the community believed in "pay to play." The Parks and Recreation Divisions are scheduled to submit a request to increase the fees later this year. The proposed fees are competitive with Sarasota and Lee counties and can provide in excess of \$40,000 additional annual revenue.

*Cost Savings and Recovery.* The County has done an excellent job of outsourcing programming and privatizing certain maintenance elements. They shall continue to analyze the cost saving and efficiencies in using these methods compared to using County personnel.

*Grants.* It is important for the County to leverage its dollars to serve as a match for potential grants and sponsorships. Each of the specific development projects identified in this Master Plan can be funded in part by grant funds. The issue with grants is the dollars can not be estimated due to the uncertainty of programs being funded or final ranking of projects that may be submitted.

The Parks and Recreation Divisions will continue to apply for grants through traditional funding programs, such as the Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program (FRDAP), Florida Communities Trust (FCT) and the Office of Greenways and Trails (OGT) to leverage its dollars. Furthermore, they will look for other grants and sponsorships to fund programming. For example, the USTA can providing funding

support to expand tennis in urban areas and the ESPN Access to Sports partnership with NRPA provides average grants in the amount of \$15,000 to support youth sports programming (a list of possible grants is provided in the appendix). *The County will strive to increase their annual funding through grants, by adding a position with at least half of their responsibilities focused on grant application and compliance. This position can also be responsible for other related duties such as partnerships and volunteers.*

#### 4.6 Operational Considerations

Part Two discusses the importance of maintaining a highly trained and motivated staff to implement the vision for this Master Plan. To achieve this, the County must address the following staffing and operational issues.

##### 4.6.1 Create Maintenance Zones

The county is extremely large and geographically divided by water bodies and I-75. Maintenance personnel assigned to each regional park to provide maintenance for parks within each RPA will lower trips traveled, increase actual maintenance times and decrease carbon emissions. It is assumed that the parks developed in the Babcock Community will be maintained through the Community.

##### 4.6.2 Partnerships Pay

As stated throughout this Master Plan, the County has done a great job with developing partnership; however, to provide the projects identified in this Master Plan it is imperative that the County continue and expand the partnerships they have with other agencies and organizations to assist in land acquisitions, park development, programming and operations. There are numerous private, non-profit, and quasi-public projects on-going throughout the County that can create benefits for the public in general. Leveraging these partnerships are critical to the future success and cohesiveness of the park and recreation system.

The County shall continue to focus on the development of strong partnerships to facilitate the Divisions' initiatives, programs and projects.



Such partnerships include the Office of Economic Development, Public Works, MPO, School Board, local environmental groups, sports and youth associations and state and federal agencies.

#### 4.6.3 Volunteers

There is not a parks and recreation agency in this nation that does not count on its volunteers to complete its strategic direction. The County will continue to expand its volunteer program to supplement on-going operations, maintenance and programming. Adopt-a-Park and Adopt-a-Trail programs, civic and non-profit groups are all resources to tap into to increase system efficiency.

#### 4.6.4 Standard Operating Plan

The Parks and Recreation Divisions shall update the Standard Operating Plan to include procedures for assigning personnel, clearly define duties for routine maintenance, and employee training. The Plan should reflect the importance of supervisors having a focus on the technical details of the maintenance and management tasks. Supervisors shall be considered "working supervisors" in that they are performing the activities for the personnel they are assigned.

#### 4.6.5 Positions are Key

Based on information provided (organizational charts and number of personnel), conversations with Staff, and certain assumptions, the Parks and Recreation Division's organizational structure was reviewed. The County is doing an adequate job of maintaining what it has through the use of contract services, programs provided by others, and through in-house personnel. It is important to note that as the County improves existing facilities and adds new ones, the impact to operations and management will be greatly impacted. To maintain industry standards and meet public demand, additional staff will be required.

The following provides guidelines in determining staff levels as the County continues to improve. In addition, there are a couple of positions that the County should fund immediately to assist in

meeting the vision, strategic direction, goals, and strategies continued within this Master Plan.

*Park Maintenance Personnel.* The Parks and Recreation Divisions have approximately 27 full time (excludes the manager) equivalent employees (FTE) to maintain over 936 acres of active parkland, this equates to 34.6 acres per employee. The National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) has identified that the *optimal acreage to FTE is 25 acres*. The current maintenance LOS is further degraded based on the County maintaining numerous small, mini, and neighborhood parks. To meet this standard, the County would need to seek an additional 9 employees, if all maintenance activities were performed by County staff. The County currently uses contracted maintenance to fill this staffing need. As the County acquires additional land, the FTE to every 25 acres of active land will be used.

*Recreation Staffing.* In reviewing available information, it was difficult to gain an understanding of the current roles of each staff member assigned to Recreation or the agreements to provide recreational programming services. Therefore, a comparison was performed to compare staffing levels with Lee County and Sarasota County, as shown in Table 10.

Community	Population	Staff (FTE)	Ratio
Sarasota	390,000	46.39	8.4
Charlotte County	176,217	20.19	8.72
Lee County	661,000	34	19.4

Table 10—Recreation Staffing Comparisons

County recreation staffing levels compare favorably with Sarasota County. Based on total resident population (including seasonal), both communities are providing under a ratio of under 9 FTE. Lee County is somewhat unique in their ratio is 19.4 FTE, but they also have committed to providing more recreation programs internally than both Sarasota and Charlotte County. The

Lee Parks and Recreation Department is also supported by over 72,000 volunteer hours.

Whereas Sarasota and Charlotte has primarily been a facility provider; other community groups and non-profits have carried out programming. The examples include football, baseball (i.e. Little League), adult softball, and other similar recreation programs that are being managed and carried out by others. Additional information about programs and camp attendance compared to State averages can be found in the Needs Assessment in the Appendices.

Based on this benchmarking and department philosophy, it appears that the recreation positions identified in the budget are sufficient for the level of service currently being provided. An expansion or modification to existing programs will require a re-evaluation of staffing levels. These efforts shall coincide with the staff's evaluation of program attendance and success rates recommendations identified within this Master Plan. The collection of additional data consistent with how PRORAGIS subcategories are organized will make future assessments easier for department management.

*New Positions.* Through discussions with County staff and based on a review of the County's existing staffing plan, there is a need for *an urban forester* to assess the existing tree inventory, oversee maintenance activities, and direct the reforestation of many of the County's park's. This position is also key in the development of educational materials and programs. The urban forester position will fulfill previously stated objectives relating to additional shade, park, and community improvements which are also directly related to other County goals, objectives and redevelopment direction.

To meet the goals identified in increasing the number of grants received by the Parks and Recreation Divisions and in increasing the level of partnership agreements, the County needs to create a *partnership/grants coordinator position*. Currently these activities are being provided by others that have other primary responsibilities and the ability to focus on these activities can not be properly prioritized.

#### 4.7 Communications & Marketing

Charlotte County Parks and Recreation Divisions have developed a current brand and tagline/ banner "**Get Up, Get Out, Get Active.**" For the brand to be effective it must be used consistently and repeatedly. The County will use this branding statement on all communications and materials. The brand will be maintained for at least 3 years, then be reevaluated to determine if it needs to be updated or changed to meet current demand or trends. At a minimum, the County will conduct the following:

- Integrate the brand on the Parks and Recreation Division's webpage.
- Use the brand on all stationery, press releases, media kits, presentations and printed materials (flyers, brochures, GUIDE, etc.).
- Use the brand, or at least fonts and color scheme, on facility signage.
- Use the tag line on all facility campaigns, including fundraising.
- Use the brand to raise community awareness of the Charlotte County Parks and Recreation System and entice participation in programming and special events.
- Consider using the logo and tag line on park signage.
- Consider the adoption of standard colors and materials to be used in all Charlotte County parks that continue to build public recognitions that a park is a Charlotte County facility.

#### 4.8 Evaluation & Monitoring

Charlotte County is committed to updating its plans as necessary to meet the changing needs of the community. The County will celebrate and communicate its successes such as acquisitions, groundbreakings and grand openings. At minimum the County will conduct the following.

*LOS Updates.* The County will review annually the existing LOS within the county to ensure that the

minimum adopted LOS is maintained as population changes, parks are reclassified, facilities are removed or added, or acreage is added.

*PRORAGIS.* The National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) has launched and is actively updating a national data base for public parks and recreation across the nation. The system is called PRORAGIS. The County will update its agency profile (last update was 2013 data) and maintain its inventory and operational information on an annual basis. In addition to benchmarking information, NRPA has launched PRORAGIS 2.0, allowing GIS software to calculate and map a variety of datasets, including marketing and demographics information, drive or walk time, or even population density mapping. The County has started to input its inventory and will commit to updating this system on an annual basis. The information generated through this program will provide great guidance and insight in developing the next level of **detailed planning as the County's implements this Master Plan** and seeks CAPRA accreditation. Access to use this database and GIS tools is free.

*Program Evaluations.* The County will continue to review and further refine an evaluation process for recreational programs, to include participant levels, fees, costs, and user satisfaction surveys.

*Capital Planning.* The County will update its capital improvement plan on an annual basis.

*Master Plan Updates.* At a minimum, the County will review the Parks and Recreation Master Plan Update every 10 years, with an interim review every 5 years.

#### 4.9 Regulatory Plans

Charlotte County will incorporate the recommendations of this Master Plan, where **appropriate, into the County's Comprehensive Plan and the Land Development Code.**

#### 4.10 CAPRA Accreditation

With the adoption of this Master Plan, the County will move forward in seeking agency accreditation through the National Recreation

and Parks Association's Commission for Accreditation of Parks and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA). CAPRA accreditation demonstrates that an agency meets established benchmarks for delivering high quality service.

##### 4.10.1 CAPRA Standards

The accreditation process will require the Parks and Recreation Divisions to comply with 36 Fundamental Standards and meet an additional 108 standards. The following list identifies the required information the County must provide to demonstrate compliance with the CAPRA fundamental standards.

- 1.0 Agency Authority, Role, and Responsibility. The Parks and Recreation Divisions must identify jurisdictional information and the procedures for making decisions. The Division's **strategic direction, vision, goals and objectives** must communicate the organizational purpose and strategic direction.
- 2.0 Planning. Planning functions within the Parks and Recreation Divisions must be discussed. The Standard includes having a least one staff member or a consultant with planning capabilities. The Divisions must show how they are involved with federal, regional, state, and local planning. The Parks and Recreation Master Plan Update provides much of the information required. Part 4 of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan Update can serve as the required strategic planning framework.
- 3.0 Organization and Administration. Information **regarding the organization's structure** must be provided, including an organizational chart. Proof demonstrating public access to the administrative offices must also be provided. Internal and external communication procedures must be formalized. Marketing and community relations plans are to be provided. The Divisions' **management information system** shall demonstrate how relevant statistical and data summaries are generated. Information is to be uploaded into

PRORAGIS for ease of reporting and generating comparison reports.

- 4.0 Human Resources. This Standard focuses on the quality of the Divisions' employees. Policies, procedures, including a code of ethics statement must be provided. Effective employee supervision is a critical element. The Divisions must include training programs, and assurances that employees are qualified, including certification and education requirements. A volunteer management manual is to be provided that includes a discussion on how volunteers are recruited, supervised, and recognized.
- 5.0 Financial Management. The Divisions must provide a fiscal policy, revenue policy, grant procedures, policy for the acceptance of gifts and donations, and procedures for receiving support from private and non-profit organizations. Purchasing, budgeting and accounting systems are to be discussed in detail.
- 6.0 Programs and Services Management. To meet this Standard, the Division must submit a recreational programming plan that includes the Division's role, 3–5 year programming plan, methods for updating the plan, and a public leisure education program. The programming plan must include procedures and outreach activities to reach underserved populations.
- 7.0 Facility and Land Use Management. The Parks and Recreation Master Plan Update provides much of the information required here, including acquisition procedures. A maintenance and operational standards manual must be provided that provides staff direction on how facilities are operated, maintained, and managed.
- 8.0 Public Safety, Law Enforcement, and Security. Laws, ordinances, rules, and regulations governing the Divisions' areas and facilities are to be provided. Posting requirements and methods are to be discussed. Law enforcement regulations pertaining to the authority and ability of law enforcement officer to enforce laws and

ordinances at Charlotte County parks and recreation facilities. An emergency and risk management plan is to include the procedures to be followed, a communication plan, and training procedures.

- 9.0 Risk Management. The Parks and Recreation Divisions will be required to submit a comprehensive risk management and procedures plan. The plan is to include procedures for operating, reporting, and training. The Parks and Recreation Divisions must identify a specific position that is responsible for risk management. An ADA compliance plan is also required.
- 10.0 Evaluation, Assessment, and Research. Process must be developed for systematic evaluation of the Divisions. PRORAGIS should be used for benchmarking and data comparisons. To meet this Standard the Divisions must show how they are meeting LOS standards; and demonstrate they are periodically updating the Needs Assessment and Countywide Parks and Recreation Master Plan. The Divisions must provide statistical information on the programs and services being provided, including attendance, program capacity ratios, and cost recovery information. Recreation trends should be assessed periodically to ensure that they are meeting current demand. The Divisions will be required to perform at least one annual experimental research project.

#### 4.10.2 Accreditation Process

There are three phases over a five-year review cycle. The phases include the self assessment report. This Master Plan and the Needs Assessment (Appendix A) will assist the Parks and Recreation Divisions in completing a self assessment report. The next phase is the on-site visit by Commission representatives. The third phase is the Commission's full review of the required application, self assessment, site visitation report, and other support documentation.

The book *Management of Parks and Recreation Agencies 3rd Ed.* (2010), serves as an information

reference for the CAPRA process. The Parks and Recreation Divisions should use this document in completing the Self Assessment Report. The following lists the steps required for initiating accreditation:

- Assign at least one staff member to serve as CAPRA coordinator during initial application process
- Review in detail *CAPRA Accreditation Handbook* (latest edition)
- Send at least one person to CAPRA training
- Complete and submit preliminary application
- Conduct self assessment
- Host visitation/on-site evaluation
- Accreditation
- Annual reports

The preliminary application fee is \$100. The fee for the review is \$1,650. Once accredited, there is an annual fee of \$300. The County is responsible for covering all travel costs of the Commission's visitation team. The visitation team will make the on-site evaluation within two years of submitting the application. Site visits are made in the spring or summer.

The County will be required to send at least one agency member to attend a CAPRA training session within five years prior to submitting its application. All costs are born by the County for travel and lodging.

Once the Charlotte County Parks and Recreation Divisions attain accreditation, it will be required to complete a new self assessment and will be revisited by Commission representatives every five years. During each of the years between accreditation and the follow-up visit in five years, the Divisions must submit an annual report that discusses how the Divisions are complying with the Commissions' standards.

#### 4.10.3 CAPRA Benefits

Accreditation will demonstrate Charlotte County's commitment to providing high quality

parks and recreation services, facilities, and programs. The accreditation process is lengthy, but well worth the time and investment by Charlotte County to achieve national recognition of its Parks and Recreation Divisions.

#### 4.11 Conclusion

The Master Plan and its recommendations will provide Charlotte County with a guide for future parks and recreation facility development. This Master Plan is intended to be dynamic in nature and change with the community's future needs.

## Appendices

- A. Charlotte County Needs Assessment
- B. May 2015 Public Workshops Summary
- C. Park Inventory LOS Matrix
- D. Conceptual Site Plans
- E. Charlotte County Annual Park Site Assessment Form
- F. Charlotte County Potential Grants List