



# CITY OF SANTA PAULA

## Parks and Recreation Master Plan



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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### INTRODUCTION

With a consultant team in place, the City of Santa Paula began working on updating its Park and Recreation Master Plan in Spring 2005. The purpose of doing a Park and Recreation Master Plan is two fold. First, it provides the City with an opportunity to assess its past growth and where it is in terms of providing the needed facilities and programs to serve that growth. Secondly, it provides the City with an updated Master Plan containing policies, park standards, current and future needs assessments, analysis of facility conditions, fee adjustments and funding/financial recommendations which results in a current strategic planning document allowing the City to address the needs, issues, and demands for recreation programs, facilities, and parks to better serve the Santa Paula community now and in the future.

The updated Master Plan will provide City Council and staff with guidelines and strategies to use when dealing with the problems and issues associated with the difficult job of determining how to allocate the City's limited resources in the area of Parks and Recreation.

### METHODOLOGY

A comprehensive effort was made to obtain information to serve as the basis for this document. With the assistance of City staff and other local service providers, an inventory of parks and recreation facilities located within the City was developed. The inventory lists recreation facilities on elementary and high school sites as well as on City parks.

Meetings with City staff and interviews with local organizations and service providers, volunteers, City commissioners and City Council members gave the consultant team insights into the community's attitudes and feelings regarding recreation facilities and programs. Detailed survey questionnaires were distributed to stakeholders who could not be interviewed. This provided data concerning recreation program and facility needs from those most intimately involved in the community. Field and facility use information was obtained from the various community sports groups and City staff. Finally, public input was obtained through a Community Input Workshop.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN

- To identify existing and future needs for recreation facilities
- To identify existing and future needs for services and programs
- To address financial and location issues related to the acquisition of park property
- To determine what improvements are needed at existing facilities
- To gain community input regarding its perceived needs for parks and recreation
- To develop policies and guidelines to use when addressing park and recreation decisions

- To present funding/financing alternatives that could provide an implementation strategy
- To develop a long term Capital Improvement Program for turning the identified needed acquisitions and improvements into reality

## DOCUMENT ORGANIZATION

The document is divided into six chapters:

### *Chapter 1.0 – Parks and Recreation Planning Overview:*

This chapter identifies community goals for the Master Plan, contains a discussion of the history of Santa Paula and the project background and purpose, and discusses the various plans, policies, and programs that affect the City’s park planning process.

### *Chapter 2.0 – Existing Parks and Recreation Resources:*

This chapter includes a list of current recreation facilities, programs and services; an analysis of recreation activities offered in the community; and suggestions on how to enhance service to the community.

### *Chapter 3.0 – Demand and Needs Analysis:*

This chapter provides an analysis of both the perceived demand and the actual need for park and recreation facilities and programs. It also summarizes all of the community input and feedback, as well as identifies community issues concerning park facilities and recreation programs.

### *Chapter 4.0 – General Policy Guidelines:*

This chapter covers general guidelines and policies that the City can use to make decisions on issues regarding parks and recreation facilities and programs. This chapter can also be used by staff, elected and appointed officials to develop annual goals and objectivities for work programs and to be a guide when periodically updating the “Parks and Recreation Facilities Element of the Santa Paula General Plan”.

### *Chapter 5.0 – Fiscal Analysis and Capital Improvement Program:*

The first few sections of this chapter give an overview and analysis of various opportunities for funding, financing and developing revenue to implement the acquisition and development recommendations that are contained in *Chapter 6*. The remaining sections of this chapter include a fiscal analysis that addresses funding alternatives; capital cost estimates; capital funding sources; and maintenance and operations cost estimates. A Capital Improvement Plan provides both staff and the City Council with a long term strategy that could be used when considering park improvements, possible funding sources, and improvement costs.

### *Chapter 6.0 – Implementation Recommendations*

This chapter addresses the action or implementation plan. It suggests recommendations to help the City develop and improve adequate recreation facilities to meet community needs and demands. A major emphasis on improving existing facilities as well as developing new facilities on existing parks and possible school properties is included in this chapter. The

acquisition of park land through the development process is also recommended. This chapter also contains recommendations and action plans for recreation and human service programs.

#### *Appendices:*

There are several appendices that include a glossary of terms used in the document:

- Community workshop results; a Community Survey form used to obtain community input;
- A list of interview questions that were used in personal interviews with community leaders; and
- A list of park development standards the City can refer to when either negotiating with developers for park improvements or planning City development of parks.

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

### *Inventory of Park and Recreation Facilities*

As of September 2005, the City of Santa Paula has two Neighborhood Parks, eight Mini Parks, and two Special Purpose Parks. The two Neighborhood Parks are Teague Park and Las Piedras Park. The eight mini Parks are Railroad Plaza, Mill Park, Obregon Park, Fagan Barranca, Veterans Memorial Park, Ebell Park, and Moreton Bay Fig Tree Park. The Special Interest Parks are George Harding Park and the Skate Park at Veterans Memorial Park.

The primary buildings that serve the community for recreation activities are the Santa Paula Community Center and Senior Center, the Railroad Plaza Depot Building and the Santa Paula Library. Private organizations such as the Boys & Girls Club, located in Harding Park and the YMCA provide a variety of recreation and social service programs to Santa Paula residents. These organizations have expressed interest in and are willing to explore opportunities for partnering with the City to provide shared facilities and programs within the City of Santa Paula.

Santa Paula High School, Isbell Middle School, and seven elementary schools allow organized sports leagues to play on their fields and grounds providing additional recreation opportunities and open space to many City residents. The City has a Joint-use Agreement with the Santa Paula Elementary School District and is currently exploring more ways to use more school facilities for recreational purposes.

## MASTER PLANNING PROCESS

The Master Plan process was a coordinated effort between City staff and the consultant project team. The process consisted of four major tasks: research, community input, analysis and recommendations. Numerous meetings, interviews, surveys and site visits were included. Hundreds of hours were spent researching and analyzing the data collected. Policies, action plans and recommendations were developed with thought to both physical and fiscal limitations. The desires and requests of stakeholders and the political sensitivities of special interests were considered. Draft sections of the document were reviewed by the project team and discussed with staff. The resulting

document is the project team's best effort at identifying the community needs and demands for park and recreation facilities and programs, and matching those needs and demands to recommended improvements, new development and future programming.

## MASTER PLAN SUMMARY

### *Community Input*

Community input into the Park and Recreation Master Plan was obtained a number of ways. Interviews were held with City staff, School District staff, non-profit agency representatives, County and State officials, youth sports organizations representatives, and Council and Commission members. A community workshop was held where residents could speak on the issues of facilities, programs, and services. Surveys were distributed to stakeholders who were unable to participate in the direct interview process. Finally, the consultant team visited and talked to various business representatives associated with the tourist industry in town.

## NEW PARK CRITERIA STANDARDS

The City will be receiving numerous new parkland dedications through future residential development. It is important for the City to establish park criteria standards so that the parks that serve these future residents are adequately developed with the appropriate amenities, properly located so that they are easily accessible, and built so that the City can easily maintain them in the future. *Appendix E* of the Park and Recreation Master Plan provides a detailed set of park standards for Community Parks, Neighborhood Parks, and Special Purpose Parks, including "Mini Parks".

The following is a summary of the general criteria for each type of park:

### *Community Parks*

Community Parks are intended to provide community-wide recreational facilities and a larger variety of recreation opportunities than a Neighborhood Park would provide.

Community parks can provide a wide variety of uses such as swimming pools, athletic fields, community/recreation centers, cultural centers, picnic areas and gardens. Community parks also serve neighborhood park needs for the immediate neighborhood surrounding the park.

Usable size for Community Parks is usually between 15 to 40 acres. However, when land is scarce, community serving facilities can be located on as little as 10 acres. A Community Park usually services several neighborhoods within a radius of two miles. Each Community Park should have a minimum base level of development, as identified in Table E-1, *Base Level Park Development Guidelines for Community Parks*.

### *Neighborhood Parks*

Neighborhood parks are intended to provide for the daily recreation needs of residents in the immediate vicinity of the park. Primary uses can include passive open space, active play areas, picnic areas and practice play fields with limited lighted facilities. Usable size is usually between five to fourteen acres. Although a neighborhood park should not be less than five net acres in size. Some cities are forced to include neighborhood park facilities on three- to five-acre parcels because of either high land costs or lack of available land. The service area for Neighborhood Parks is a radius of one mile. Each neighborhood Park should have a minimum base level of development, as identified in *Appendix E, Table E-2 Base Level Park Development Guidelines for Neighborhood Parks*.

### *Special Purpose Parks*

These types of amenities may provide a wide range of activities, with passive to active to specialized recreation functions. Special Purpose Parks can include aquatic centers, sports complexes, skateboard parks, trail head parks, open space preserves, special event facilities, golf courses and other special interest facilities. Special Purpose Parks can also include “Mini Parks”. Mini parks serve to accommodate immediate neighborhood areas by providing such amenities as play areas, play equipment, barbecues, and picnic benches. They are generally developed as individual or small lot developments within existing neighborhoods that are underserved by Community or Neighborhood Parks. They may contain a sports court, tennis court, spray pool or other special amenities. Each Special Purpose Park should have a minimum base level of development, as identified in *Appendix E, Table E-3 Base Level Park Development Guidelines for Special Purpose Park Amenities*.

The City should review and modify as necessary the park development guidelines contained in *Appendix E* and use them to help determine the size, location and development amenities that should be included when acquiring future parkland and in negotiating the dedication of parkland and the development of parks by future developers of residential property.

## MAXIMIZING EXISTING AND FUTURE FIELD USE

The issue of making better use of existing fields and insuring that there will be adequate field space in the future was a common occurrence during the public input process. *Chapter 6* has some specific recommendations for Teague, Las Piedras and Harding Parks. There are several ways the City can approach this issue. *Chapter 4* also contains a number of policies and action items to implement that will provide the community with more field use to satisfy their needs. Some of the suggestions in the Master Plan include:

- Installing artificial turf at Teague Park and Las Piedras Park sports fields to accommodate year round play.
- Helping youth sports organizations with grant funds to develop fields and facilities.
- Making sure new fields are included in future park development.

- Working with the County and State agencies to develop fields in regional parks under their jurisdiction.
- Exploring ways to attract a commercially developed and operated sports complex.
- Acquiring additional property adjacent to Teague Park, Harding Park and reconfiguring Las Piedras Park for field development.

As the community grows with new residential development, the need for adequate sports fields will increase, and the City must position itself to meet this demand. While there is a trend toward individual sports, such as skateboarding, BMX, rock climbing, etc., there will always be a demand for team sports, especially in communities with a high number of young families like Santa Paula.

## PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

The City, as well as other organizations, including nonprofit agencies and volunteer groups in the community, offers a variety of recreation activities and services to the Santa Paula community. Human and Social Services are also coordinated by the City's Community Services Department.

An analysis of current recreation programs and activities was undertaken as part of the Master Plan process. The preliminary findings were developed using information from program materials, interviews, and internet sources along with meetings with staff and community members at the public workshop held during the process. The most popular activities that residents currently participate in include: picnicking, walking/jogging, youth sports, instructional classes, senior programs, and special citywide family events.

Major issues concerning recreation programs, activities and services identified during the process were related to the lack of park and recreation facilities available in the community, as well as, the condition of existing facilities and the desire for better upkeep and improvements to update them to meet the community's growing needs. Not enough lighted facilities exist for outdoor activities such as practice fields for youth sports and walking/jogging trails. There were also requests for a multipurpose gymnasium and community swimming pool, because the Santa Paula High School pool is currently used to capacity, and there is no time available for the City to operate open swim and other recreation programs. Comments like "There aren't enough sports facilities in general to handle the demand for tournaments, drop-in or casual games" were also heard. Many of the participants at the first public workshop stated that some of the parks do not feel safe.

During the process, additional concerns identified the need for more passive recreation facilities to accommodate picnicking, walking, biking and equestrian activities. When respondents and participants were asked about what additional programs were needed, most responses were tied to the lack of appropriate facilities to handle activities such as safe and productive places for teens to recreate and gather.

The suggested policies and guidelines contained in *Chapter 4* and the implementation recommendations contained in *Chapter 6* of the Master Plan are offered to enhance the provision and coordination of existing services and programs and also assist staff in developing new programs to meet community needs. City staff already has implemented some of the suggested practices at

least in some part, and does an excellent job responding to the community's recreation needs. Many of the actions suggest that some of the current policies and procedures need to be revisited and re-evaluated.

The challenge will be how to continue to respond to a very diverse community and provide the necessary facilities and services efficiently and effectively under the current budget constraints. Revenue development must be a major goal for the future to insure funding for delivery of park and recreation programs and services.

## TOTAL CAPITAL COSTS

To accomplish all of the recommendations in the Master Plan for acquisitions and improvements, the City would have to find over \$25 million in available funding or financing and an estimated \$200,000 of on-going annual revenue to maintain the acquisitions and improvements. The City has several options for funding the recommended improvements, acquisitions, and developments. Naturally, the option the City chooses to implement will depend on the economic climate, the political will of elected officials, and the understanding and support of the community. If the City wishes to pursue funding and development of the recommended capital improvement program all at one time, it should consider implementing a voter approved park bond and additional tax assessment alternative described in *Chapter 5* of the document. If the City wishes to pursue implementing the capital improvement program over a period of time, it could pursue a 15-year plan as described in *Chapter 5.6* of the document which would provide for priority development of facilities and time for implementation of new revenue streams to fund the recommended improvements.

In any event, the City needs to pursue and utilize all available per capita grant programs from state and federal sources; revise and implement its residential park dedication and in lieu fee program; consider assessment opportunities to pay for the impact they have on the Park and Recreation system; consider a park fee for commercial and industrial development; and, implement cost recovery user fees for use of City assets, services, and programs. By establishing these funding sources, the City will position itself to have the money necessary to meet the future park and recreation facility development demands of the community.

## MAINTENANCE AND OPERATIONS

Maintenance of existing parks was a big concern of residents during the community input process. There are a number of policies and action items recommending increases in the maintenance levels of existing parks. Such things as repairs of broken items, removal of graffiti, pick up of trash, repair of irrigation systems, cleanliness of restrooms and facilities, park aesthetics, security lighting, and maintaining proper signage are all important items to improve park safety and the public's perception and image of the City.

If the City can implement some of the revenue development alternatives presented in the Master Plan, such as the Asset Management Program, user fees, market priced rental rates, and park concessions, it should be able to eventually develop specific revenue streams to cover a substantial portion of the estimated \$200,000 per year in park maintenance and operation costs necessary to provide the desired level of service.

The consequences of not improving park maintenance include the following:

- Accelerated depreciation of park amenities
- Increased crime and vandalism
- Increased gang activity
- Negative public perception of City operations
- Decreased property values surrounding parks
- Increased renovation costs in the future

The City will be taking on the maintenance and operation of several new parks in the future as development occurs and parks are dedicated to the City. It is important for the City to make sure these parks are designed with the intent that they will produce revenue to offset their maintenance and operation costs.

## CONCLUSIONS

The policies and action items provided in the Master Plan will supply the basis for implementing future park acquisition, development and programming. Specific policy and guidelines will help the City address areas that include: Quimby Act Requirements and the City's Park Impact Ordinance, existing park site enhancement, park site selection criteria, park acceptance criteria, criteria for classifying and designing parks, park credit, special community recreation facilities, joint use agreements, park phasing and financing, and processing of proposed parks. The following actions will provide a framework for the City Council and staff as they make decisions about meeting park and recreation needs of Santa Paula residents over the next 15 years:

- Adopt the Comprehensive Park and Recreation Master Plan and use the document for making planning decisions regarding Park and Recreation programs, services, acquisitions, funding, and financing.
- Incorporate the policies recommended in the document into the City's General Plan and update the policies periodically to insure they reflect the current trends, needs, and demands of the community.
- Implement as many of the recommended action items as politically and financially possible, especially those action items pertaining to revenue development which will enable the City to then implement the remaining action items for acquisition, development, and programming.
- Determine the best political and financial option for implementing the Capital Improvement Program presented in the document.