

Recreation and Open Spaces Element

City of Punta Gorda Comprehensive Plan 2045

Ordinance 2013-2024
February 7, 2024

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The demand for outdoor recreation and open space continues to be a challenging issue. With population and demographic trends changing in Florida, a wide variety of recreational activities are needed. Increasing populations, retired populations, and all income level families are seeking leisure-time activities. Thereby leading to continued demand for a variety of recreational facilities, organized open space, and other leisure-related activities.

The city has a solid foundation of natural and cultural resources on which to build an expanded park and recreation system. At the time of the 1997 Comprehensive Plan's adoption, recreational demand was generally being satisfied with the exception that the local parks were deficient in some portions of the city. This occurrence was due to the uneven distribution of parks which resulted in some of the city's parks being overused while others were underutilized.

As Punta Gorda's population grows, it is important that the quality of existing facilities improves and the amount of recreation and open space increases to meet the needs of the community. The City of Punta Gorda Strategic Plan identifies some of the areas the City is interested in improving and increasing services. This was especially true regarding the need for the City to produce a Parks and Recreation Master Plan (PRMP).

As part of the previous Comprehensive Plan update, the City set a policy to update the PRMP, originally adopted in December 2009, within five (5) to ten (10) years. The current plan details and analyzes the community's needs and vision of an interconnected, sustainable, and unique park system for Punta Gorda. This vision incorporates the development of the city's waterfront as a critical

component in the enhancement and revitalization of the downtown district, as well as connecting the city's neighborhoods with alternate transportation options.

The key to developing a successful park system is to determine community needs and preferences, and to adopt level of service (LOS) standards for those needs which, when implemented, will provide the land, facilities, and programs in locations that serve and satisfy the public. The PRMP also provides an inventory of existing and proposed park sites. Each was evaluated for its design as a passive or active park, and by how the community wants to use each park (for festivals, art markets, relaxing, sports activities, etc.) with amenities added accordingly.

The 2009 Comprehensive Plan evaluated the level of service (LOS) to the city's residents and visitors through the preparation of the PRMP. The plan assessed and analyzed the city's park facilities and recreational needs. The City reviewed the citizen input through a public charrette and established a level of service specific to the City of Punta Gorda. Key projects were identified to be completed and also to fulfill the residents' and visitors' needs. A similar analysis and public input will be utilized to evaluate the progress the City has made since the changes were adopted.

A plan of action to provide future generations with a meaningful level of service was developed in the City's concept of the Punta Gorda Pathways, previously known as "Ring Around the City". The project, once completed, will encircle the city with a series of multiuse recreational trails, linear parks, and a harbor walk that connects key destination points to neighborhoods and business centers. In addition, the completed pathways will improve pedestrian and bicycling connectivity and enhance economic vitality of the core commercial areas. Once completed, the City must either maintain the parks in-house or subcontract the work to others.

The Parks and Grounds Division is responsible for the development, operation, and maintenance of city parks and recreation facilities. Approximately 23 developed parks and various recreation facilities are maintained by the department. Besides the parks, the Parks and Grounds Maintenance Division provides care and maintenance for the grounds around all City-owned buildings, on eight separate sites and maintains all street trees and associated landscaping.

The City's principal funding sources for parks and recreation are impact fees and ad valorem taxes. Impact fees can only be used for land acquisition and capital improvements that increase the level of service. Operation and maintenance expenses typically come from ad valorem taxes. A host of other, less reliable, sources exist—mostly in the form of grants. State acquisition programs and some limited federal funds can be used to acquire open space that has passive recreational value. The City can supplement these funds by establishing a private civic fund to channel contributions and legacies to build parks. This fund could also help finance other projects such as museums and libraries.

The *Goals, Objectives, and Policies* section is adopted by ordinance. This section identifies the city's vision of the park system, establishes the new level of service standard for parklands, identifies funding sources, proposes land management strategies, and provides policies that will successfully implement these strategies. It also includes policies which implement the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended, in all city recreational facilities.

// INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The *Recreation and Open Spaces Element* provides a process for determining the recreation and open space needs of the community based on analysis of existing recreational facilities and establishing goals, objectives, and policies to meet future community demands. This process covers a wide range of factors which analyze the number of facilities, park typologies, size of park land, location of parks and facilities, character of the park landscape, function of the park, quality of the park, and quality of the facilities.

Locally based, long-term open space conservation plans help communities protect their environment, improve quality of life, and preserve critical elements of local heritage, culture, and economy. Well-managed open space programs protect a community's natural green infrastructure, providing places for recreation and preserving important environmental and ecological functions.

Like development, conservation can be either planned or haphazard. While a reactive preservation strategy can preserve critical lands, it often does so in a scattershot way, so that conserved lands are fragmented. Small fragments of conserved land have less ecological value as wildlife corridors, are less accessible to community members, and have reduced value in directing growth to existing areas than larger parcels connected by corridors. The *Recreation and Open Spaces Element* helps identify critical areas for preservation, such as large areas of high-quality habitat, corridors, stream buffers, and wetlands. Preserving them for human enjoyment is not only an economic opportunity,

but a boon to human health in the form of recreation and water-quality improvement.

Relationship to the City's Comprehensive Plan

There are several key connections between the *Recreation and Open Spaces Element* and other elements of the City's Comprehensive Plan, which include the following:

- ❖ The *Future Land Use Element* provides the overall growth management strategies for the city by defining the direction and intensity of future growth and development. This element strongly influences the analysis of future recreational demands and facility needs in different portions of the city.
- ❖ The *Transportation Element* provides input on the issue of accessibility of park and recreation facilities at the neighborhood, community, and citywide levels, and on linkage opportunities between parks, open space, and alternative transportation corridors such as bikeways and pedestrian walkways.
- ❖ The *Infrastructure Element* describes the availability of public water and sewer, and drainage facilities, which will greatly influence development trends within the planning horizon, influencing the analysis of recreational demand and facility needs.
- ❖ The *Conservation Element* contains key data and goals concerning exceptional natural resource areas, wildlife corridors, and other issues having implications for park and recreation location criteria and potential "greenway" linkages.
- ❖ The *Coastal Management Element* contains key data and goals concerning exceptional natural estuary areas, beach and waterway access, and other issues having implications for park and recreation location criteria, and water based recreation activities (e.g. boat launches, public marinas).

- ❖ The *Intergovernmental Coordination Element* provides opportunities to improve City collaboration and coordination with other agencies, such as the School Board, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, in the delivery of park and recreation services.
- ❖ The *Capital Improvements Element* will reflect the City's strategy for the delivery of infrastructure and other public services that serve a primary role in growth management and help shape future demand for recreation. In addition, the *Capital Improvements Element*, which is updated annually pursuant to *Florida Statutes*, establishes the five-year budget plan for park and open space capital outlay.
- ❖ The *Historic Element* enhances the City's strategy to preserve and protect Punta Gorda's locally designated historic districts and landmarks by connecting key destination points through the Punta Gorda Pathways concept. These multiuse recreational trails will enable residents and visitors access to the city's most valued and important assets.
- ❖ The *Property Rights Element* establishes the appropriateness of park and recreation facility siting with respect to private property. Public facilities shall not impact a private property owner's right to quietly enjoy their property.

III. LEGISLATION

Federal Regulations

Antiquities Act

An Act for the Preservation of American Antiquities (Antiquities Act) was signed into law in June 8, 1906. The Act was the first U.S.

law to provide for the general legal protection of cultural and natural resources of historic or scientific interest on public lands. It established that preservation of archeological and historical sites is in the public's interest and falls under government purview.

Endangered Species Act

The Endangered Species Act [ESA (16 USC 1531-1544)] passed in 1973 and, as amended over the years, provides for the conservation of endangered and threatened species of fish, wildlife, and plants, and for other purposes. The City of Punta Gorda adopted policies that support the intent of this act through the preservation and conservation of land, promote recreational programs, and support the goals, objectives, and policies of the *Conservation* and the *Coastal Management Elements*.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

Act passed July 26, 1990 to establish a clear and comprehensive prohibition of discrimination on the basis of disability. The City of Punta Gorda adopted goals to conform to the intent of this act, thereby, ensuring that recreational programs, when viewed in their entirety, prove accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities.

State Regulations

Senate Bill 712 and Executive Order 23-06

Senate Bill 712 and Executive Order 23-06 (signed in 2020 and 2023, respectively) committed further funding to the Florida Forever Program. The funding was used to acquire more than 170,000 acres for conservation to help protect Florida's water resources and make communities more resilient. This marks the State's continued focus on strategic acquisitions that benefit vulnerable ecosystems, and preserve and improve Florida's environmental quality for future generations.

Florida Statutes

Chapter 163, Part II, *Florida Statutes*, requires that local government comprehensive plans contain a recreation and open spaces element; however, it provides no specific guidelines as to its content or format.

Chapter 163.3177, Fla. Stat.

The section of the statutes allows for required and optional elements to be included in a local government's comprehensive plan. It allows for the plan to include those principles, guidelines, standards, and strategies for the orderly and balanced future economic, social, physical, environmental, and fiscal development of the area that reflects community commitments to implement its plan and its elements through meaningful guidelines of goals, objectives, and policies.

Chapter 259.105

Chapter 259.105 (2016), *Florida Statutes*, also called the "Florida Forever Act", is a land acquisition program that protects environmentally sensitive land from development. It purchases land that grants access to waterways, broadens open spaces, and can be held for recreation or conservation in perpetuity. Lands acquired as part of Florida Forever around the city expand the recreation and open space opportunities available to Punta Gorda's residents.

Chapter 267.0612

Chapter 267.0612, *Florida Statutes*, establishes the Florida Historical Commission which advises and assists the Florida Department of State's Division of Historical Resources. The Florida Historical Commission was created to enhance public participation and involvement in the preservation and protection of the State's historic and archeological resources. The Division of Historical

Resources directs historic preservation efforts throughout the state in cooperation with state and federal agencies, local governments, private organizations, and individuals.

Local Regulations

Strategic Regional Policy Plan

The Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council adopted a Strategic Regional Policy Plan (SRPP) in 1987 and subsequently amended it in 1991, 1995, 2002, and 2011. The 2011 SRPP provides a long-range guide for the physical, economic, and social development of the region for the purpose of creating a more healthy and sustainable future.

The City continues to participate in projects that protect our greater natural resources through the acquisition of regionally significant lands that provide for a variety of values and functions. Through public awareness and educational programs recommended in the SRPP, the policies of the *Recreation and Open Spaces Element*, and sound growth management practices, the City will continue to proactively promote planning strategies that protect and enhance the provision of regional open space and recreation.

City Ordinance

Ordinance 1702-12

As a local regulation which affects recreation and open space, the City has adopted the Impact Fee Ordinance (1702-12) which requires development to contribute its proportionate share of funds, land, or public facilities necessary to accommodate any impacts having a rational nexus to the proposed development. In 2012, City Council adopted an amendment to the City of Punta Gorda Ordinance increasing park impact fees while suspending police, fire, and general government impact fees indefinitely for

new development. Currently, for single and multi-family projects, the City is only charging impact fees for parks and roads.

Additionally, the City utilizes a portion of infrastructure surtax (ISS), a one-cent optional sales tax, to fund various park improvements. In the past, these funds have been used for streetscaping and park improvements.

IV. INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS

Background/Introduction

In order to plan for the best possible parks and recreation system it helps to understand what parks were, what comprises recreation, and what is the current park inventory. From there, the City must identify current and future needs for the delivery of recreational services as they relate to the growing population, and the role these services will play in the continued economic sustainability of the city.

Open space development has numerous environmental and community benefits. It can be used to mitigate the harmful impacts of development by reducing impervious cover and setting aside land that promotes infiltration of water runoff. Rainfall that is channeled through soil and sediment is cleaner when it meets its eventual terminus in streams and rivers. Open space requirements reduce potential pressure to encroach on resource buffer areas as well as reduce soil erosion and the potential for flooding.

Furthermore, the capital cost of development and stormwater management is reduced by concentrating runoff in one area, and minimizing runoff volumes. As an added economic benefit, property values are increased when sited adjacent to open space and can be used to foster a sense of community and pedestrian movement. These areas also create invaluable urban wildlife habitat islands.

Most importantly, open spaces support other community planning goals, such as affordable housing, architectural diversity, and satisfy the desire to protect the natural, historic, and community resources. Both the recreational opportunities and improvement to surface drinking water afforded by preserving open space are beneficial to human health and enhance the community's quality of life.

The provision of adequate recreation and park facilities will become more challenging as the population of the area continues to grow. With a diverse population, shifting demographics, and changing economic trends, a wide variety of recreational activities are needed. While retirees continue to be the dominant component of the population growth, an increasing number of families of various income levels choose to live and work in Punta Gorda; thereby, leading to continued demand for a variety of recreational facilities, organized open space, and other recreational related activities.

Originally adopted in 2009, the updated Parks and Recreation Master Plan (PRMP) will provide the changes necessary to continue to meet the recreational needs of the city. The 2009 PRMP addressed the need to change the classification of parks from the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) references in the previous Comprehensive Plan to a City-specific classification. The city's park system was composed of a variety of park types: state and federal, regional, environmental, urban, waterfront, neighborhood, and linear. Each is described in the following sections. While each park is distinct in how it operates within the overall park system, certain consistency of design standards are necessary to reinforce community character and understanding of the parks as pieces of the same vital system. Key to the city's park system is the strategic concept of Punta Gorda Pathways.

State and Federal Parks

Recreation facilities in the state and federal park systems are designed for mass use. These areas generally include scenic, historic, geologic, or ecologic features and are attractive to large segments of the population and can be classified as "special purpose" or "regional" recreational facilities. Although these parks are available for use by city residents, the City is not responsible for maintenance and management of these facilities and does not apply a level of service standard for this designation. The state and federal parks immediately affecting the city of Punta Gorda are described in Table 5.1 and identified on Map #41 – State/Federal-Owned Recreational facilities and Sites.

State/Federal Owned Recreational Facilities and Sites.

The State and Federal government has acquired a significant amount of acreage as natural reserve and preserve land. Many acres of these tracts include an outdoor recreational component in the form of hiking trails, nature trails, and allow for other passive activities such as bird watching and photography. Regionally, there is tremendous diversity of recreational opportunities. In Charlotte and DeSoto Counties, for example, the State has purchased more land to link wildlife corridors and protect environmentally sensitive land. Some of the purchased lands are currently used for agriculture and may remain under cultivation, but can never be developed. These regional programs are headed by the Southwest Florida Coastal Conservation Corridor (SWFCCC) project (a partnership of environmental and governmental organizations), the Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program Restoration Plan, and Environmental Lands Acquisition Advisory Council (ELAAC).

Map #41 - State/Federal-Owned Recreational Facilities and Sites

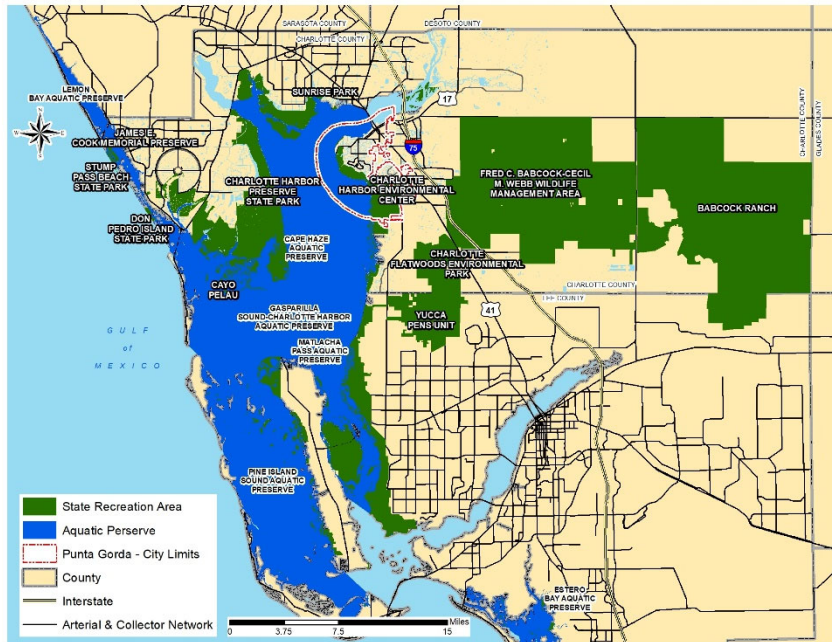


Table 5.1 - State/Federal-Owned Recreational Facilities and Sites Affecting Punta Gorda

Park Name and Ownership	Affected Area	Location	Acres	Facilities Available
Charlotte Harbor Preserve State Park- State	County and City	Charlotte Harbor	45,387	Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center, 7.75 miles of trails, pavilion, canoe/kayak launch, interpretive exhibit, historic site
Don Pedro Island State Park - State	West County	Placida Road, Don Pedro Island	230	One+ mile long saltwater beach area, pavilions, boat dock, boardwalk, ferry landing, trails, canoe/kayak launch

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Stump Pass Beach State Park - State	West County	Beach Road, Manasota Key	245	nearly 1.25-mile long saltwater beach, trails, pavilion, historic site, canoe/kayak launch
Lemon Bay State Aquatic Preserve - State	West County	Lemon Bay	8,000	No land facilities, open to water-related activities
Cape Haze State Aquatic Preserve -State / Island Bay Wildlife Refuge - Federal	West County	Cape Haze/ Charlotte Harbor	12,700/20	No land facilities, open to water-related activities, 2 historic/archaeological sites
Gasparilla Island State Park - State	County and City	Belcher Road, Boca Grande	127	Trails, beach, lighthouse, interpretive exhibit
Babcock Ranch (includes Conservation Easement)	East County	State Road 31	74,000	Privately operated - eco tourism
Charlotte Flatwoods - State	East County	US 41 and Zemel Rd	16,866	None presently
Cecil M. Webb Wildlife Management Area - State (includes the Yucca Pens Unit)	East County	S. of SR 74, E. of US 42, W of SR 31	80,772	1,280 acres for primitive camping, 25-acre camp sites, hunting, target range, 3 boat ramps, field trial area for hunting dogs
Total Acreage			318,828	

Source: <https://www.floridastateparks.org> 2023

Regional Parks

Regional parks are identified on Map #42 – Regional Parks Serving the City. Regional parks are usually greater than eighty (80) acres, serve an average of 50,000 or more residents in a 10-mile radius or up to a 30-minute driving time. They provide recreational opportunities, whereas city recreational facilities are smaller acreage and meet a variety of smaller recreational needs. Development of these parks generally facilitates active recreation serving a larger population, however, occasionally park development encompasses educational or wildlife management

purposes. These parks enhance the region’s quality of life, resulting in economic and social benefits.

The City of Punta Gorda relies on the Charlotte County Parks system for the provision of regional park facilities. The County offers a variety of parks and recreational facilities in the Punta Gorda area. Charlotte County Parks Department provides soccer, baseball, football, and other organized recreational opportunities.

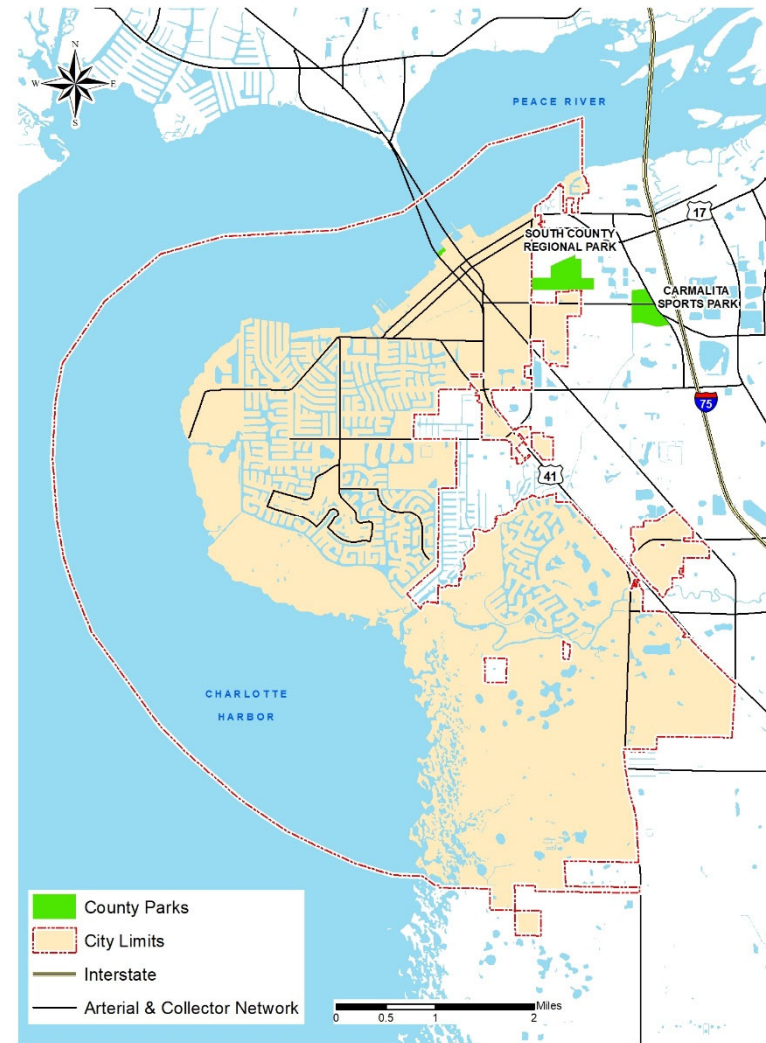
Specifically, parks such as South County Regional Recreation Center and Carmalita Athletic Park provide the city with sufficient

access to athletic fields, skate parks, a BMX track, a recreational center, and public pool facilities.

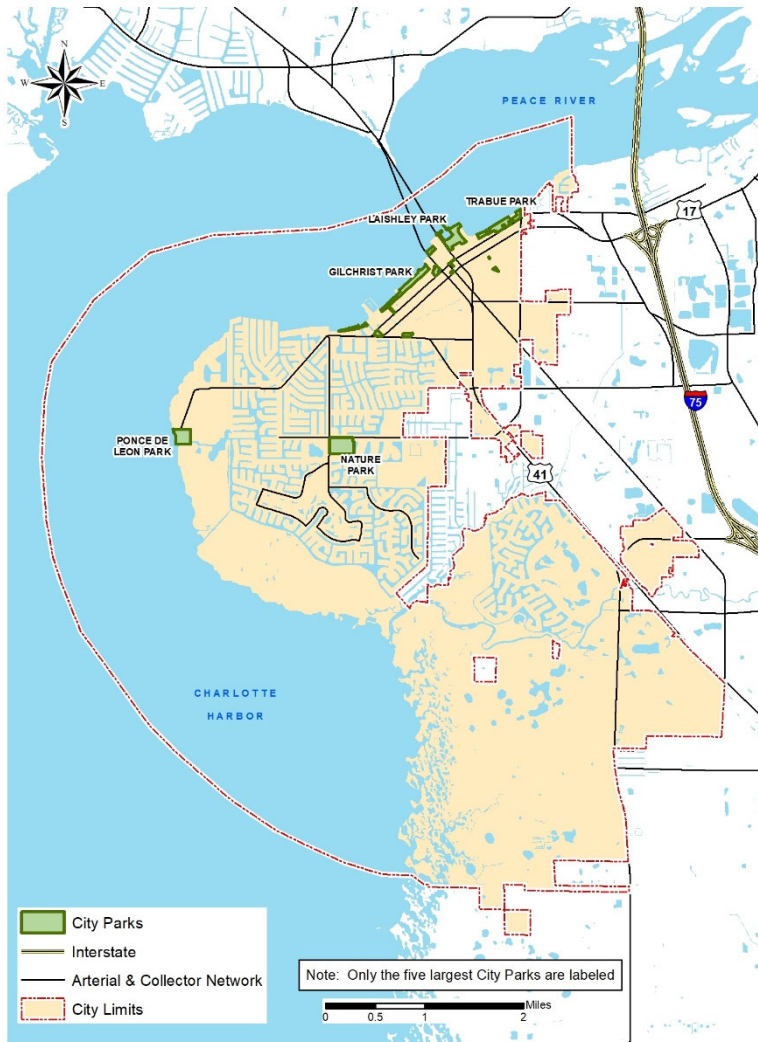
City Parks & Recreational Facilities

With the exception of the Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center and the Charlotte County Events Center all other parks and recreational facilities within the city boundaries are maintained and managed by the City as shown on Map #43 - Punta Gorda City Parks and Recreational Facilities and in Table 5.2.

Map #42 - Regional Parks Serving the City



MAP #43 Punta Gorda City Parks and Recreational Facilities



Environmental Parks

Environmental parks serve as Punta Gorda’s historic connection to Charlotte Harbor. They form the foundation of the community’s understanding of the need to preserve natural ecological systems. Without significant preservation of environmentally sensitive lands over the past years, the natural beauty and function of Charlotte Harbor would have seen declines similar to other significant Florida estuaries and bays. This focus on environmental protection was seen as foolish when compared to the economic prosperity wrought by unbridled development. However, now with the wisdom that comes with experience, the preservation of environmental resources is seen as an economically sustainable one.

Although the city of Punta Gorda does not truly have any environmental parks, Nature Park and Ponce de Leon include environmental features. The City currently relies on Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center (CHEC) for the provision of an environmental park facility.

Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center

Within the city, the Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center (CHEC) provides educational and passive recreational resources. The non-profit CHEC organization leases land from Alligator Creek State Preserve, which forms part of a 30,000+ acre State Park Preserve bordered to the west by the Charlotte Harbor Preserve State Park. The main attraction at the preserve is the area’s four (4) miles of nature trails.

Punta Gorda Nature Park

The Punta Gorda Nature Park is a twenty-one (21) acre park situated in the center of Punta Gorda Isles neighborhood. The park includes pine palmetto forest and salt/high marsh habitats that include a multiuse recreational trail and observation deck. The remainder of the park is disturbed upland areas that present opportunities for the development of a variety of outdoor recreational activities. Staff

works with a volunteer group to maintain and enhance the park for educational outdoor classroom training and nature lectures.

Alligator Creek Park

Alligator Creek Park is approximately two (2) acres and primarily serves the Burnt Store Isles neighborhood of the city. The site is heavily wooded and bisected by Alligator Creek. A significant portion of the park is used as a storm water retention basin for an adjacent shopping center. Picnic facilities and horseshoe pits are available, however, additional facilities could enhance its attractiveness and usability.

Urban Parks

Urban parks or plazas are the public cornerstone of any great urban environment, providing a green relief from the intensity and excitement of urban landscape. This green relief creates a public gathering space for the exchange of ideas and the random social interactions that form the vital links of a city.

Urban Parks within the City shall be created through a combination of features that may include walkways that reinforce pedestrian connections to activity nodes, the creation of plaza space for social gatherings, green space for picnicking, and small events. Other features may include native trees for shade, benches, and tables for reading, eating and resting, fountains for sound attenuation, signage for identification or distinction, small scale parking, and pedestrian scale lighting for safety.

Within the context of a commercial environment a ¼ - ½ mile walk represents a prime opportunity for a lunch time stroll or break. All commercial districts in Punta Gorda allow mixed-use development and the service areas may prove useful in providing adequate park facilities to those living in these urban environments.

Hector House Plaza

This site was purchased in 2003 by the City of Punta Gorda Community Redevelopment Agency for the purpose of providing a public gathering space and additional parking for the historic Charlotte County Courthouse. The courthouse facility underwent a complete historically accurate restoration in 2009. As a complement to this restoration the design of the site incorporated an urban plaza occupying approximately 1/5 (one fifth) of the site. The improvements include seating, landscaping, and a brick path. The area hosts a weekly Farmer's Market every Saturday, year round.

Herald Court Centre

Herald Court Centre is a combination of 400-parking spaces, in a four-level parking garage and a retail center on the first floor with 17,000 square feet of space. The project was constructed on a site just over one (1) acre, located on a city block adjacent to the historic county courthouse. In addition to serving the parking needs of the downtown area, the top floor of the parking garage is rented out for events.

History Park

History Park is a nine (9) acre park located in the central part of the city. The park serves as a relocation site for historically significant structures saved from demolition. This facility is operated in conjunction with the Punta Gorda Historical Society. The park now has a total of four (4) local historic homes. Three of the homes are open to the public. In addition, the site hosts a weekly Farmer's Market on Sundays throughout the year and a community garden was completed in 2016.

Waterfront Parks

Waterfront Parks such as Gilchrist, Laishley, and Ponce de Leon, serve regional and local users. Citizen and City Council input seeks to increase recreational opportunities and restore some of the historical activities that once occurred along the waterfronts. The goal of these parks is to maximize the connection of citizens and visitors to the water. These ideas are being developed as a secondary product of the City's Master Plan. While residents from parts of Charlotte, Desoto, Sarasota, and Lee Counties come to enjoy the numerous events, providing a key component of economic activity along the city's waterfront, these parks also serve adjacent neighborhoods. These local users within the ¼ - ½ mile radius can walk/bicycle to the parks.

Alice Park

Alice Park is approximately one (1) acre located between W. Retta Esplande and the Charlotte Harbor, offering a water view and walking path connected to the city's existing multiuse recreational trails.

Bayfront Center

The City leases the Bayfront Center to the YMCA. The facility offers a community room for small, group events. The YMCA offers afterschool programs and fitness club activities. In addition the Charlotte Harbor Community Sailing Center, a 501(c) 3 non-profit, operates out of this location. A new hand-launch boat ramp was completed in 2012. After Hurricane Ian in 2022, the building is slated for demolition, but City Council seeks to rebuild it so it can continue to serve these vital community organizations.

Breakers (Brown) Park

Breakers Park provides panoramic vistas of the Peace River. The park consists of two land parcels containing approximately one and one-half (1.5) acres of land that has been partially developed as a passive park. It is a portion of the waterfront parks that is connected through the city's existing multiuse recreational trails. Brown Park, the second piece of land, is beautifully landscaped.

Charlotte Harbor Event and Conference Center (in the city, owned by the County)

The Charlotte County Event and Conference Center is located in the central business district of the city but is owned by the County. Hurricane Charley damaged the facility beyond repair in 2004, and the new Event Center opened in 2009. Designed as a multi-function 44,000-square-foot facility, it contains conference rooms, classrooms, and dining capabilities for both large and small occasions. The facility also has a great lawn for outside events. Its ability to host a variety of venues makes it an important component and an asset to the downtown business area.

Elizabeth and Wilson Park

Elizabeth Park contains approximately two and a half (2.5) acres located in Punta Gorda Isles along Charlotte Harbor. This facility offers a water view and walking path just off the city's existing multiuse recreational trails.

Gilchrist Park

Gilchrist Park provides approximately twelve (12) acres of Charlotte Harbor waterfront just west of US 41, hosting a variety of active recreation opportunities including, basketball, pickleball, tennis, and a children's playground area. Additionally, passive recreational areas include picnic pavilions, a waterfront gazebo, and a fishing

pier. As part of the Harborwalk Project, Gilchrist Park underwent renovations to include a new seawall, a 20' promenade along the harbor to complete the connection between the commercial anchors, Punta Gorda Waterfront Hotel and Fishermen's Village, on either side of the park. The Harborwalk is a key factor in increasing the economic viability and sustainability through the connection of important pedestrian components to the downtown area. The connections include the small businesses, restaurants, shops, and stores, which serve the local residents as well as tourists. The completion of the Punta Gorda Pathways, a strategic series of multiuse paths encircling the city, will link key destination points, improve pedestrian and bicycle connectivity, and enhance the economic viability of the core commercial areas.

Laishley Park

Laishley Park contains seventeen (17) acres, originally developed in 1993, within the Downtown District. In 2005, redevelopment of the park began with the construction of new docks, a boat ramp, parking facilities, and a marina building containing a Harbor Master's Office and a community room. Additionally, construction of a restaurant, open pavilions to facilitate a fresh market, and an outdoor concert area/festival space were completed in 2010. This facility hosts a variety of festivals and events from chili bake-offs to concerts and is host to a 4th of July celebration.

Ponce de Leon Park

Ponce de Leon Park is a sixteen (16) acre facility located along Charlotte Harbor. The park contains a boardwalk through a mangrove forest, a non-profit wildlife sanctuary, a fishing pier, a beach area, a small children's playground, and boat ramp facilities. The park is effectively buffered from the surrounding neighborhoods by a portion of the Charlotte Harbor State Buffer Reserve.

Veterans Park

Located in Laishley Park, Veterans Park includes a garden, gazebo, freedom fountain, mural, over fifty standing marker plaques, and hundreds of memorial bricks. The park hosts the 50% replica of the Washington Vietnam Wall Memorial.

Pittman Park

Pittman Park is approximately one (1) acre, located between W. Retta Esplanade and the Charlotte Harbor, which offers a water view and walking path connection to the city's existing multiuse recreational trails.

Shreve Park

Shreve Park is approximately one (1) acre, located along Charlotte Harbor. This facility offers a water view and walking path just off the city's existing multiuse recreational trails.

Trabue Park

Trabue Park, previously identified as Mangrove Park, was renamed to give recognition to Isaac Trabue, a founding father of Punta Gorda. The park contains ten (10) acres of mangroves and uplands located along the Peace River east of US 41. The park contains observation decks and a multiuse recreational trail. It serves as a trailhead for the Punta Gorda Pathway section known as Harborwalk East. Long-term plans include the development of this parcel into a gateway park.

Neighborhood Parks

Neighborhood parks generally serve a small geographical area and contain park amenities that are specific to the neighborhood's demographics (for example, retirees, families, or seasonal residents). These facilities occur within a reasonable

walking/biking distance of the neighborhood it is intended to serve.

It is vital to understand the conditions, uses, and functions that make a park an integral part of a neighborhood. Neighborhood parks are rare within the context of the existing Punta Gorda parks system. Hounds on Henry, Nature Park, and South County Regional Recreation Center serve as neighborhood parks primarily due to their location within or adjacent to residential communities. While sections of Gilchrist and Ponce de Leon Park also serve the function of neighborhood parks these facilities generally serve a wider and more varied audience focused on the waterfront location.

Baker Park

Baker Park is a joint venture between the School Board of Charlotte County and the City. It consists of an area on the Benjamin J Baker Elementary School's property that was developed by the City and is maintained by the School Board. It was completed in 2008 and is well used by the local residents, school facilitators, and students.

Bailey Brothers Park

Built in 2015, dedicated to seven brothers that served their community and their country in the Armed Services from World War II to the Vietnam War, Bailey Brothers Park is open to all who live in Punta Gorda. This community park provides a common setting for children to play, parents to talk, families to be active together, and neighbors to enjoy one another.

Cooper Street Recreation Center

The Cooper Street Recreation Center contains approximately three (3) acres and serves the city of Punta Gorda. As one of the city's most intensively developed parks, Cooper Street offers a variety of educational support, cultural stimulation, and recreational

opportunities to the city's youth. Upgrades through Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding provided new playground equipment, replacing the twenty-year-old, outdated equipment. The equipment improves the facility dramatically, making it a safer and more user-friendly center.

Hounds on Henry

This park contains approximately one and a half (1.5) acres and provides a fenced area, sidewalks, and other facilities for residents and their canine companions. This park is heavily utilized and demonstrates the need for similar facilities throughout the city.

Sculpture Park

Sculpture Park is approximately one (1) acre and centers around a pond that also serves as a stormwater mitigation facility. The site includes sidewalks and a plaza area for the display of public art.

Punta Gorda Nature Park

Although the Punta Gorda Nature Park is listed as an environmental park, the twenty-one (21) acre park situated in the center of the Punta Gorda Isles neighborhood also serves the area as a neighborhood park. In addition to its environmental significance, the park boasts upland butterfly, edible, rock succulent, and native gardens. The volunteer group meets on a weekly basis to maintain and enhance the park for educational, outdoor, classroom training and nature lectures. The group will be expanding to include summer camp visits by area students.

Punta Gorda Pathways

Connecting residents and neighborhoods to the waterfront, other park areas and communities are vital in achieving a sustainable park system and a major objective of the community. This need was

first identified in the 1990's and was crystallized into a tangible vision in the Mayor's 2008 State of the City Address as the "Ring Around the City" now called the Punta Gorda Pathways (Map #44). By encircling the city, this connection of multiuse recreational trails, linear parks, and the Harborwalk will:

- ❖ Link key destination points,
- ❖ Improve pedestrian and bicycling connectivity,
- ❖ Enhance the economic vitality of the core commercial areas,
- ❖ Promote the utilization of underdeveloped existing parks,
- ❖ Create access avenues for destination places,
- ❖ Provide venues for entertainment, waterfront activities, historical sites, and meeting places serving both residents and tourists, and

Linear Park

Linear Park is a nine (9) acre, abandoned, railroad right-of-way developed as a three-phase project that provides activity node opportunities for the adjacent neighborhoods. This park is part of the City's Punta Gorda Pathways Project that improves bicycle/pedestrian connectivity throughout Punta Gorda. Now completed, the pathway connects along the west end of Gilchrist Park at West Retta Esplanade, running south along the City's right-of-way to Cross Street/US 41 South. Phase I was funded by federal stimulus money through the Florida Department of Transportation. Phases II and III were paid with City funds.

Multi Use Recreational Trail (MURT)

Approximately four (4) miles long, the US 41 Multi-Use

- ❖ Provide and improve transportation opportunities for all residents and businesses within the city limits.

The overall Map #44 - Punta Gorda Pathways promotes a variety of personal, environmental, social, and economic benefits, which will improve the city's overall quality of life.

Harborwalk

The Harborwalk section is situated along Charlotte Harbor and encompasses approximately three (3) miles of the Punta Gorda Pathways. It is a signature feature for the city. This pathway connects East Punta Gorda, at Bayfront Medical Center, to West Punta Gorda, at Fishermen's Village, with safe access paths under both US 41 bridges.

Recreational Trail (MURT) provides visitors and residents an opportunity to connect to neighborhoods and commercial areas south of the historic core of Punta Gorda. A complete list of all parks, their sizes and amenities can be found in Table 5.2.

Pittman Park Extension

Pittman Park Extension is a paver-pathway, built in 2008, connecting Marion Ave to West Retta Esplanade across from Pittman Park. It was financed through a public-private partnership with Cedar Village Condominiums.

Map #44 Punta Gorda Pathways

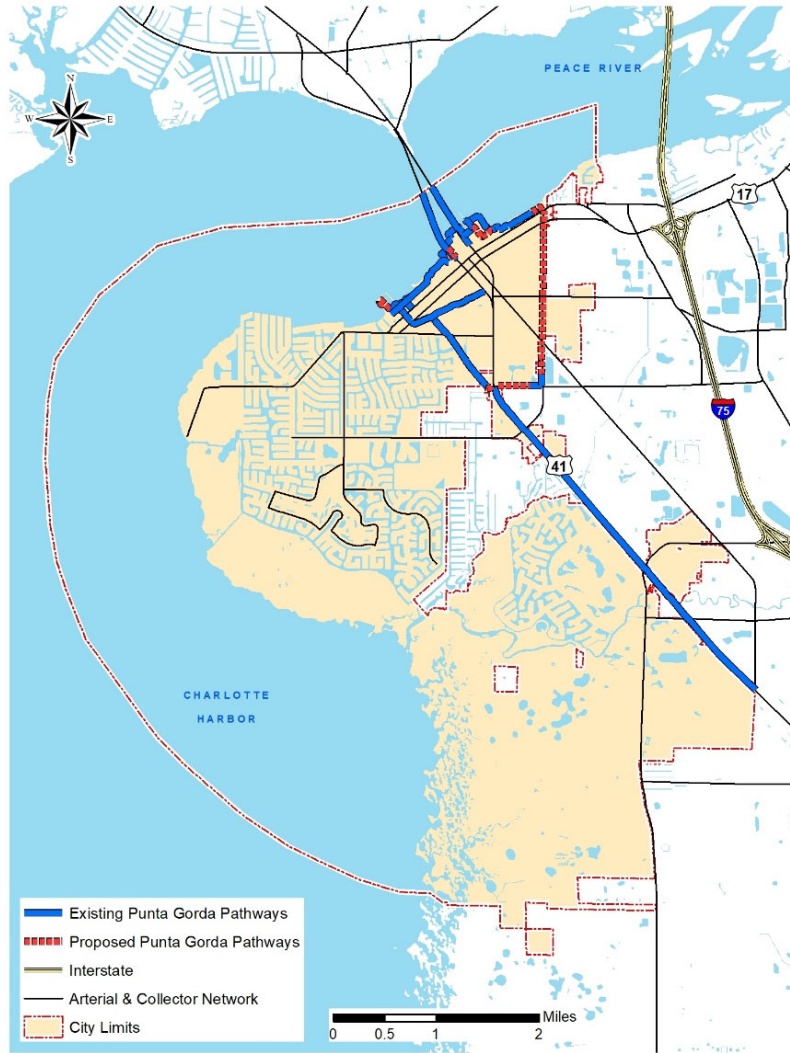


Table 5.2 – City Recreational Facilities and Sites

	Location	Acres	Facilities Available
<u>Environmental Parks</u>			
Punta Gorda Nature Park	1555 Aquí Esta Drive	21	Picnic tables, benches, information kiosk, bike rack, 1-mile nature trail, hiking, jogging, two boardwalks, wetland area, educational, butterfly, herb and wetland gardens, one fishing pier, benches and 2 parking lots
Alligator Creek Park	10941 Burnt Store Road	2	Portion of the park is used as a stormwater retention basin for an adjacent shopping center. Picnic facilities and horseshoe pits
<u>Urban Parks</u>			
Herald Court Plaza	Herald Court	<1	Pedestrian Plaza, fountain, and seating areas
Hector House Plaza	Taylor Street	<1	Pedestrian Plaza, game tables, and seating areas
History Park	Shreve Street	9	Historic structures saved from demolition, bike path/sidewalk, community garden, Sunday Market
<u>Waterfront Parks</u>			
Alice Park	802 W. Retta Esplanade	1 +	Sidewalk for walking, jogging, and biking, native plants, benches
Breakers (Brown) Park	Breakers Court/W. Retta Esplanade	1 +	Benches and beautiful harbor views
Charlotte Harbor Event and Conference Center (in City owned by County)	75 Taylor Road	7+	Recreation center, event center, fishing, picnicking, benches, Harborwalk
Elizabeth & Wilson Park	Park Beach Circle	<3	Small walking/ jogging trail, native plants, benches, and harbor view
Gilchrist Park*	1000 West Retta Esplanade	12	Picnic tables, gazebo, 2 pavilions, 2 tennis courts, 8 pickle ball courts, 1 playground, 4 basketball courts, fishing pier, Harborwalk , jogging & biking, gardens, restroom facilities, four parking lots
Laishley Park*	200 Harbor Walk Dr	17	400' fishing pier, boat ramp and trailer parking, * full service public marina, gazebo w/fountain, Kiwanis Park & Veterans Garden, shelter w/picnic tables, restrooms, sidewalks for walking, jogging, and biking

RECREATION AND OPEN SPACES ELEMENT

Pittman Park and Extention	802 W. Retta Esplande	1+	Sidewalk for walking, jogging, and biking, native plants, benches
Ponce de Leon Park	4000 West Marion Avenue	12 Preserve 4 Developed	Picnic tables, boat ramp and trailer parking, wildlife sanctuary, playground manmade beach, two fishing piers, ¼ mile boardwalk, restrooms
Shreve Park	802 W. Retta Esplanade	<1	Sidewalk for walking, jogging, and biking, native plants, benches
Trabue Park	South of Patti Ave.	10	Undeveloped gateway park associated with the Harborwalk

Neighborhood Parks

Baker Academy Park	E. Charlotte Ave./MLK Blvd	1	Winding walking/jogging trail, open field, and benches
Bailey Brother's Park	E. Virginia Ave./MLK	1	Plaza area with chess tables, fitness equipment, small play area, walking path
Cooper Street Recreation Center	Cooper and Mary Street	3	Picnic pavilion, 2 basketball courts, 1 baseball/softball field, 1 multi-purpose/open-space field, 1 playground, 1 recreation center
Hounds of Henry	557 W Henry and Shreve Street	<1	Fenced in dog area with picnic tables
Linear Park	Retta to Tamiami Trail	9	Fitness equipment, open space
Sculpture Park	Corner of Henry and Marion	<1	Pond, fountain, art display pedestals, walking jogging, and bike path

Total Developed Park Acreage 120 Acres

Punta Gorda Pathways

Harborwalk (East & West)	East: Starting at Adrienne Ave along the Harbor around the Justice Center, Laishley Park under US41 Bridges, and Punta Gorda Water Front Hotel to Gilchrist Park. (West: Beginning at the Punta Gorda Waterfront Hotel along the Harbor to Fisherman's Village	3 mi	Ten-foot walkway for walking, jogging, and biking, connecting Harborwalk West at Fisherman's Village, foot bridge over wetland area to Linear Park 2
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RECREATION AND OPEN SPACES ELEMENT

Linear Park Pathway	Located between Retta Esplanade and US 41 South (along the abandoned Railroad Right of Way)	2 mi	Ten-foot walkway for walking, jogging, and biking, connecting Harborwalk West at Fisherman’s Village, foot bridge over wetland area to US 41 South at Helen Ave. Contains a Fitness Zone that includes an outdoor gym containing five (5) pieces of adult fitness equipment with activities designed to target various parts of the body.
MURT (Multi-Use Recreational Trails)	US 41 North from Airport Rd. to Taylor Rd Along Shreve St. from Virginia to Pompano	4mi	I - A ten-foot asphalt path US 41 North from Aqui Esta to Madrid II - A ten-foot asphalt path US 41 North from Airport Rd to Aqui Esta III- A ten-foot asphalt path US 41 North from Madrid to Taylor Rd. IV - A ten foot asphalt path Shreve St. from Virginia to Pompano
Total Developed Park (Linear miles)		9 mi	

Source: City of Punta Gorda Urban Design 2023

Community Gardens

Community gardens promote healthy communities and are places where neighbors can gather to cultivate plants, vegetables, fruits, and friendships. They provide a healthy environment that improves nutrition, physical activity, community engagement, safety, and economic vitality. Additionally, the community garden can be a learning center where local community groups promote healthy eating and active living in their communities. The gardens are divided into numerous plots. Plots are rented on a nominal yearly basis and each plot owner is responsible for planting, maintaining, and harvesting their own plot for their enjoyment. All plot owners are expected to help with general chores.

History Park Community Garden

The city’s History Park is home to the city’s second community garden. This garden was proposed after the need for more space was deemed necessary by staff and the community. Through grant funds received by Mosaic Corporation, TEAM Punta Gorda again administered the funds and completed the project through a volunteer group. The garden boasts thirty-six (36) planting beds that are rented out on an annual basis. Four ADA accessible planting beds are included. Its location lends itself to classes and joint use with the History Park and the new library facility.

Public Safety Building Community Garden

The Public Safety Building is home to the first community garden in the city of Punta Gorda. This garden was built after the need for more space was necessary from the County’s South Regional Park Community Garden. Through grant funds received by Mosaic Corporation, TEAM Punta Gorda, a local grassroots community group, administered the funds and completed the project through a volunteer group. The garden boasts eighteen (18) planting beds that are rented out on an annual basis. Two ADA accessible planting beds are included.

South County Regional Park Community Garden

The South County Regional Park was developed, and is operated by, the County outside the city boundaries. The park does serve the city’s residents within the area.

School Facilities

The Charlotte County School District facilities serve a variety of needs for residents. The District owns and maintains recreational facilities at all school sites in the Punta Gorda area. Charlotte County and the School Board of Charlotte County maintain interlocal agreements for the utilization of school-owned recreational facilities. These facilities provide diverse, organized and year-round programs at accessible locations as summarized in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3 – Publicly-Owned Charlotte County School Recreational Facilities and Sites

Park Name	District	Location	Acres	Facilities Available	Public Access
Baker Elementary	City	East Charlotte Ave.	6.28	Walking trail, open field, seating areas	No

RECREATION AND OPEN SPACES ELEMENT

East Elementary	East County	Fairway Dr.	16.3	General play field, softball field, basketball courts, covered play area	No
Sallie Jones Elementary	City	Narranja St.	13.1	General play field, softball field, basketball courts, covered play area	No
Punta Gorda Middle	City	Carmalita St.	20	Baseball field, softball field, general play field, basketball courts, tennis courts	No
Charlotte High	City	Cooper St.	49.54	Baseball field, softball field, general practice field, tennis courts, track, football field	No
Total Acreage			105.22		

Source: Charlotte County School Board and City of Punta Gorda Urban Design 2023

Other Recreation Sites

In addition to the inventory of developed parkland, there are a few parcels available citywide that may be useful in serving some park needs of the various communities. These areas are relatively small parcels and may be used as either pocket parks, open areas, or trading parcels for other lands. They are described in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4 – Vacant City-Owned Parcels

Parcel Name	Address	Type	Acreage
Fire Station II adjoining parcel	Acline Rd.	Neighborhood	±2.7
	E. Charlotte Ave	Neighborhood	± .25

Source: City of Punta Gorda, 2023

Public Lands

Public lands are defined as lands owned and occupied by government institutions for general administration, postal services, law enforcement, public safety, educational, and cultural activities. In 1995, public-oriented land uses consisted of 5.5% of all developed land within the city. By 2009, Punta Gorda’s public lands increased by approximately thirty-nine (39) acres due to the acquisition and development of the twenty-three (±23) acre Nature Park/fire station and the ten (10) acre Charlotte County Justice Center. By 2020, public land in the city totaled 148 acres, yet represented only 1.4 percent of total land use.

As the city’s population continues to increase the acreage devoted to public uses will similarly need to rise to meet the new level of service standards of ¼ (primary) to ½ (secondary) mile service area.

Semi-public Lands

Semi-public land uses are classified as institutional, civic, fraternal and religious. The previous projected space requirements apply

to developed parklands and do not include facilities associated with the city's multiuse recreational trail system and the new level of service standards of $\frac{1}{4}$ (primary) to $\frac{1}{2}$ (secondary) mile service area.

Vacant Lands

Vacant lands provide for a variety of recreational opportunities such as:

- ❖ Neighborhood parks developed to suit the individual needs of the community
- ❖ Additional buffers between different land uses
- ❖ Increased green space

In addition, vacant lands may allow for creative opportunities such as shared facility locations. This type of joint venture has been successfully used with the co-location of Fire Station II with the Nature Park and the Community Garden at City's Public Safety Building.

Private Lands and Recreation

Private recreation is difficult to inventory in a comprehensive manner due to the diversity and complexity, and often rapid and frequent owner or use change. Private recreation providers generally respond quickly to opportunities for acquisition and development of properties suitable for recreational use, given market forces. This quick reaction time gives the private sector a distinct advantage in providing highly desirable recreational facilities.

Cultural Resources

Cultural life in the city is diverse and growing and constantly changing as the population changes. Activities within the city range from art lessons and gallery exhibits, to community theatre, choral

groups, and symphony orchestras. Cultural programs throughout the city and county provide both children and adults, with opportunities including painting, crafts, and instrument and voice lessons. There is a wide variety of other performing fine art groups. The small non-profit, cultural groups in the city continue to grow in size and number and provide cultural activities by private or independent sponsors.

V. LEVEL OF SERVICE ANALYSIS

Current Conditions of Level of Service (LOS)

The City achieved its goal of completing an award winning "City of Punta Gorda Parks & Recreation Master Plan" and adopted the recommended level of service standards for the City park system. The plan is required to be updated every five (5) to ten (10) years to identify changes in demographics, building development, and trends. Utilizing this new LOS, $\frac{1}{4}$ (primary) to $\frac{1}{2}$ (secondary) mile service area, the City will connect areas of the city to one of their parks delivering recreational services as it relates to the city's growing population and as a vital component of the continued economic sustainability of the city.

In order to analyze the existing park system, the level of service was developed pursuant to community input during the Parks and Recreation Master Plan public input process. This system analysis forms the baseline data that is used as part of the tracking system to gauge the progression toward the goals identified in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan and as amended. Historically, the level of service for components of a park system has been measured on a simple acre per thousand of population basis. This flat analysis does not provide any data relative to the quality of service for the delivery of the parks as a public good. Studies by local governments, universities, and others continue to illustrate the personal, environmental, social, and economic

benefits associated by being within $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ mile radius of a park. The 2040 Comprehensive Plan embraces this level of service, specifically, as it implements the citizen-driven park system vision.

The City of Punta Gorda Park and Recreation Master Plan:

- ❖ Provides an inventory of existing and proposed park sites;
- ❖ Evaluates each site for its design as a passive or active park;
- ❖ Evaluates how the community wants to use each park (for festivals, art markets, relaxing, sports activities, etc.) with amenities added accordingly; and
- ❖ Evaluates its level of service (LOS) to the residents.

The benefits identified in the City's Park and Recreation Master Plan promote the city's sense of place by providing a strong foundation on which the parks and recreation system can continue to grow and develop, creating a boaters' destination and increasing business opportunities. This development is essential for a sustainable community. Our health, community, economy, and environment all benefit from investments in a well-developed parks and recreation system.

Current Needs Analysis

In order to determine the city's current performance, the City continues to analyze the proximity of residential and commercial units to the existing park system. The existing city parks and multiuse recreational trail facilities were identified and $\frac{1}{4}$ mile primary service area, in orange, and $\frac{1}{2}$ mile radius secondary service area, in yellow, was drawn around each park. Using this basis for analysis, the red areas of the map indicate areas that are considered underserved as shown on Map #45 - Existing Punta Gorda Park Level of Service.

Map #45 - Existing Punta Gorda Park Level of Service

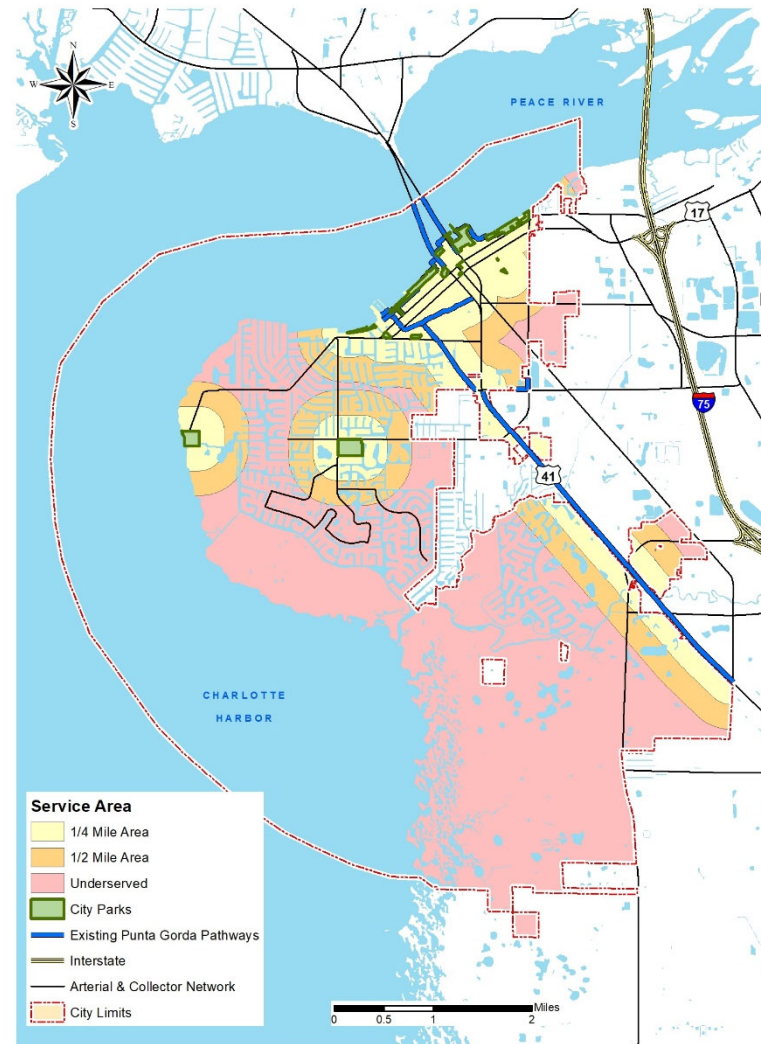


Table 5.5 – Level of Service Area Populations 2016 and 2020 provides a breakdown of the current population of the city that resides within each of these LOS Areas. Table 5.5 illustrates that 43 percent of the city’s population currently resides within the Parks System Underserved Areas, an increase of four percent in four years. These populations occur primarily within the following four major neighborhoods of the city: Punta Gorda Isles, Burnt Store Isles, Seminole Lakes, and Burnt Store Meadows. These neighborhoods are shown on Map #46 along with the Parks System Level of Service areas.

Table 5.5 – Level of Service Area Populations 2016 and 2020

Level of Service	Percent of Total Population 2016	Percent of Total Population 2020
Primary Service Area (1/4 mile)	27%	32%
Primary Service Area (1/2 mile)	61%	25%
Underserved Area (greater than ½ mile from a park)	39%	43%
Population Total	17,288	19,471

* Estimated populations based on 2016 and 2020 Census population and a City analysis of the location of existing residential units within each level of service area.

While there is a significant geography and population of the city within the identified underserved areas, there are other recreational amenities and facilities not owned by the public (City). These non-publicly owned recreational facilities, may meet at least a portion of the recreational needs within these otherwise underserved areas. These recreational facilities fall into two broad categories private

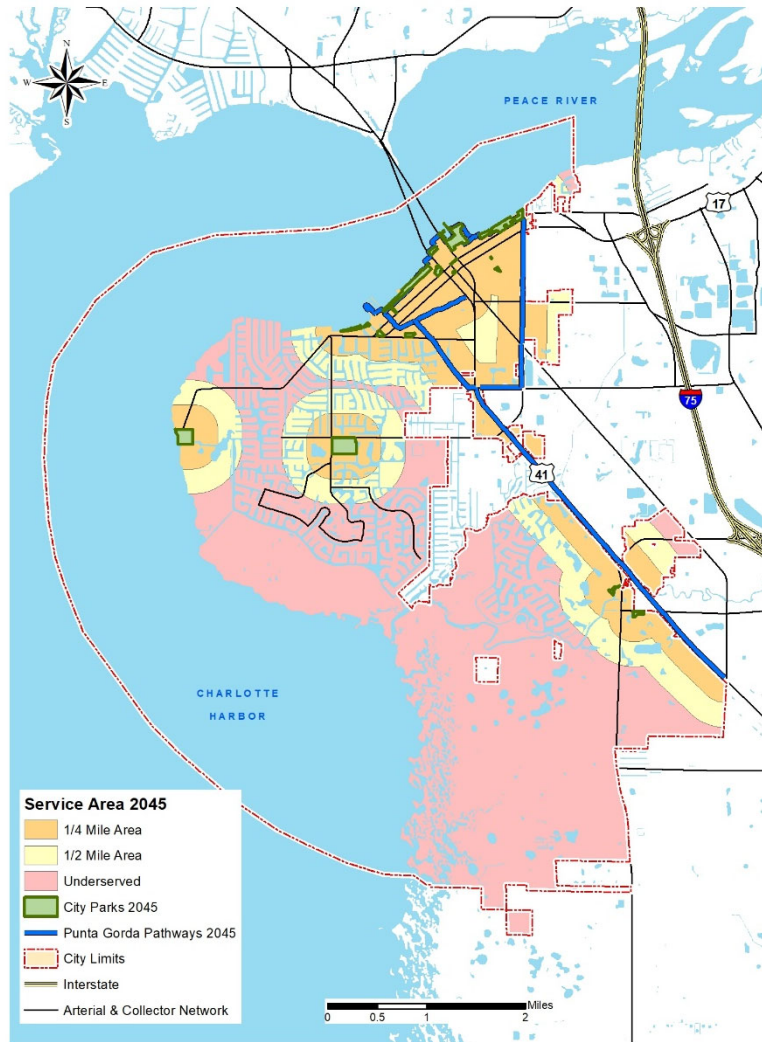
and semi-private. Private recreational facilities are those which are owned by a private entity, like a homeowners association, and where access is restricted to residents and guests of a particular community. By contrast, semi-private recreational facilities are owned by a private entity; however, access is permitted by some combination of membership or fees for service.

Future Opportunity Analysis

The personal, environmental, social, and economic benefits associated with close proximity to parks are well documented. Looking at the needs analysis, a park typology was developed specifically for the city. These typologies took into consideration the existing City parks, their location and the needs of citizens and visitors. The park types identified were: regional, environmental, urban, waterfront, neighborhood, and linear.

The City evaluated future park opportunities based on the proximity of housing units and commercial property to park land. Adequate pedestrian, bicycle, transit, boat, and vehicular access are critical components of the LOS, ensuring the efficient delivery of park services to the community. The current needs analysis illustrates that over half of the existing residential units, along with the vast majority of undeveloped residential properties in the city, occur in underserved areas as identified on the Map #46 - Punta Gorda Park Level of Service – 2045.

Map #46 – Punta Gorda Park Level of Service – 2045



In order to meet this current and future need, every undeveloped parcel will need to be evaluated for park-use potential. Opportunities exist within the undeveloped commercial lands available within the city for public-private partnerships to provide additional park facilities as development occurs.

Bicycling remains a high priority for the city's residents and visitors. Residents and businesses continue to want better and safer pedestrian/bicycle connections between neighborhoods, businesses, parks, and the waterfront. A recent Bicycle Workshop gathered information on ways to create a well-connected network of on-off street bicycle infrastructure. The City will continue to review projects to be funded over the next five (5) years for areas throughout the city that were identified as bicycle routes. These areas currently include the City's Center Cycleways, Ponce de Leon Trail, and PGI Connection/BSI Loop. Linear Park facilities, like the Punta Gorda Pathways, provide the connections between the park system and neighborhoods and commercial communities.

The City will utilize the following strategies moving into the future in connecting the residents and visitors to all parts of the city park system (previously shown on Map #46):

- ❖ Completion of the Punta Gorda Pathways system
- ❖ Implementation of the Punta Gorda Park and Recreation Master Plan
- ❖ New developments shall be required to provide parks for their residents
- ❖ Regional parks will continue to be provided primarily by Charlotte County
- ❖ The City will continue to work with governmental entities and developers to preserve environmental lands

The City of Punta Gorda Parks and Recreation Master Plan provides a list of specific projects and activities to fulfill the recreational needs of residents. The list, divided into three implementation

phases: short, intermediate, and long range, provides the City with a planned pathway of projects to be completed. Each item contains relevant information including a brief project description, the funding sources, and the anticipated completion date. This aggressive list of projects is included in the PRMP to assist the City with staying on task and providing a cohesive strategy for establishing a park system that promotes the unique character and environment of Punta Gorda.

Revenue Sources

The City's main funding sources for parks and recreation are impact fees, ad valorem taxes, and grants. The City will continue to review and apply for those grants that are acceptable to and pertain to specific City needs. Potential grant opportunities are available to the City and the City will continue to take advantage of these opportunities as they arise. While potential grant opportunities are available to the City, the City must look at other options to implement the strategies outlined in the PRMP that will satisfy the city's growing recreational needs.

Summary

The comprehensive list compiled during the development of the PRMP, and as amended in the future, will provide a list of specific projects and activities designed to move the city forward in achieving its vision of an interconnected, unique, and sustainable park system.

The wide selection of listed projects builds on the City's Punta Gorda Pathways theme and increases economic viability and sustainability through the connection of important pedestrian components, such as the small businesses, restaurants, shops, and stores that serve local residents and tourists. The completion of the Punta Gorda Pathway will encourage events and activities in the parks to enliven the public realm and provide economic opportunities for continued economic and social development.

The City will use the comprehensive strategy list as a tool to:

- ❖ Implement the vision of the City of Punta Gorda as directed by citizen input;
- ❖ Create a focal point for the City to begin connecting the parks system;
- ❖ Evaluate undeveloped commercial lands available within the city for public-private partnerships to provide additional park facilities as development occurs;
- ❖ Provide City Council the information necessary to direct staff regarding the priority projects in light of fiscal matters and constraints;
- ❖ Create a well-connected network of on-off street bicycle infrastructure;
- ❖ Evaluate annually the use and adequacy of the parkland, park facilities, and natural or historic protected lands; and
- ❖ Update and outline future opportunities and implementation strategies.

VI. GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND POLICIES

Goal 5.1: The City of Punta Gorda will ensure public and private recreation resources are available to provide public parks and open space appropriately located to the population they are intended to serve; and coordinate the City facilities with those of other governments.

Objective 5.1.1: Punta Gorda will implement the adopted Parks and Recreation Master Plan to continue to develop a system of neighborhood and community parks that serve the residents and commercial businesses utilizing the established level of service standards provided in this element.

Policy 5.1.1.1: Punta Gorda will maintain and improve the park system through implementing the strategies identified in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, the continual redesign and renovation of existing parks, and by the acquisition and development of new parks.

***Measurement:** Maintenance activities improvements and land acquired for parks as identified in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan.*

Policy 5.1.1.2: Punta Gorda will cooperate with governmental entities for the use of appropriate facilities as neighborhood or community parks.

***Measurement:** Agreements with governmental entities for use of recreational facilities.*

Policy 5.1.1.3: The Punta Gorda park system will include intensive play areas, nature oriented activity areas, extensive natural areas, special activity areas, and urban scenic and passive areas.

***Measurement:** Amount of such areas in city parks as identified in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan.*

Policy 5.1.1.4: Punta Gorda will incorporate its historic districts and structures and the multiuse recreational trails into the overall park system.

***Measurement:** Number of multiuse recreational trails connecting the historic districts to the park system.*

Policy 5.1.1.5: Punta Gorda establishes a ¼ to ½ mile radius as a level of service standard of park types.

***Measurement:** Identification of the ¼ to ½ mile radius service areas to the residential and business communities.*

Policy 5.1.1.6: Punta Gorda will update the Parks and Recreation Master Plan on a 5-10 year basis.

***Measurement:** Completion of the updated Parks and Recreation Master Plan.*

Objective 5.1.2: Punta Gorda will promote the use of public and private resources to meet recreation demands.

Policy 5.1.2.1: Punta Gorda will maintain a recreation and open space plan with standards that integrate public, semi-private, and private recreational facilities into an overall plan.

***Measurement:** Drafting and adoption of such a plan.*

Policy 5.1.2.2: Punta Gorda will require developers of residential subdivisions or planned unit

developments to dedicate or set aside lands for parks, or to develop and maintain a private or semi-private park system as part of their development, or otherwise contribute to the acquisition and/or development of parks.

Measurement: *Amount of land or contributions received.*

Policy 5.1.2.3: Punta Gorda will assist Charlotte County through the County General Fund revenues received from city taxpayers, or other appropriate financing mechanisms, in the acquisition of regional or district park sites which complement the city's park systems.

Measurement: *Charlotte County tax funds received from city residents and used for acquisition of park sites.*

Policy 5.1.2.4: Punta Gorda will acquire, when possible, property for parks and open spaces in advance of annexation to provide an adequate amount and distribution of recreation and open space lands.

Measurement: *Acres of park land acquired.*

Policy 5.1.2.5: Punta Gorda will work to incorporate the strategies identified in the City's current Alternative Transportation Plan in the development of bicycle/sidewalk and passive recreation facilities.

Measurement: *Planning and development accomplished for such a system.*

Objective 5.1.3: Punta Gorda will promote access and/or public enjoyment of all parks and open space systems in the city.

Policy 5.1.3.1: Punta Gorda will operate a park and open space system in a manner that will promote an equal opportunity for enjoyment by all persons including those with disabilities.

Measurement: *Accessibility features included in city parks.*

Policy 5.1.3.2: The City of Punta Gorda will provide access to civic life of people with disabilities by implementing the recommendations of the ADA Transition Plan.

Measurement: *Implementation of the recommendations from the final ADA Plan.*

Policy 5.1.3.3: Punta Gorda will not charge user fees at its park and open space facilities, but may require fees for events taking place at a park or to maintain its specialized recreation facilities such as boat ramps and night lighting for tennis facilities.

Measurement: *Absence of user fees prohibited by this policy.*

Policy 5.1.3.4: All public parks will have public access via a public street.

Measurement: *Documentation of public street access to public parks.*

Policy 5.1.3.5: Punta Gorda will seek to distribute parks and open spaces so as to serve all neighborhoods.

Measurement: *Park and open space acres acquired that satisfy location needs identified by plan described in Policy 5.1.1.5.*

Policy 5.1.3.6: The City shall continue to provide amenities that promote each park and enhance the enjoyment of its unique location as appropriate (kayak launches, bicycle paths, trails, sport facilities, etc.).

Measurement: *Number and type of such amenities.*

Policy 5.1.3.7: The City shall promote parks on the City's website.

Measurement: *Record of park promotions on the City's website.*

Policy 5.1.3.8: The City shall provide adequate parking and shade structures to ensure accessibility to residents and visitors.

Measurement: *Amount of parking and shade facilities.*

Goal 5.2: The City will acquire important open space systems that protect property from storm surge events and/or preserve important habitats.

Objective 5.2.1: Punta Gorda will maintain a system of open spaces that will conserve and preserve marine and terrestrial flora and fauna and their associated habitats.

Policy 5.2.1.1: Punta Gorda will preserve or restore the natural features to include native plant species and natural water flows of a site when acquiring or developing City-owned open spaces.

Measurement: *Amount of lands, vegetative cover types, restored or preserved for such properties acquired or developed by the City.*

Policy 5.2.1.2: Punta Gorda will encourage the protection of privately-owned environmentally sensitive lands by public acquisition, conservation easements, transfer of development rights, or by voluntary dedication.

Measurement: *Acres of conservation lands protected by the aforementioned means.*

Policy 5.2.1.3: Punta Gorda will consider the following criteria when pursuing the acquisition of open space:

- a) Unique features such as plant communities, wildlife populations, mangrove stands, saltwater marshes, freshwater wetlands, beaches, or sand flats.
- b) Critical ecological features such as protection of surface and groundwater quality or as a protection from storm surge events.
- c) Locations suitable for outdoor educational programs.
- d) Relatively undisturbed examples of biological communities.

Measurement: *Documentation of the aforementioned factors of any open space purchase by the City.*

Policy 5.2.1.4: Punta Gorda will make available density bonuses, or other appropriate incentives for developments that preserve environmentally sensitive lands.

Measurement: *Acres preserved through development incentives.*

Policy 5.2.1.5: Punta Gorda will assist Charlotte County in the development of a scenic wildlife corridor or trail system around the perimeter of the city and which connects to the populated city areas or the Charlotte Harbor State Preserve.

***Measurement:** Amount of funding, staff support, or other assistance leading to such a corridor or trail system.*

Policy 5.2.1.6: The City shall adopt through ordinance or in its land development regulations policies that require open space as part of development to reduce impervious cover and promote infiltration of runoff.

***Measurement:** Record of open space ordinance or land development regulation that reduces impervious ground cover.*

Goal 5.3: The City shall strengthen recreational coordination with the Charlotte County School Board.

Objective 5.3.1: The City shall consider joint recreational use agreements when possible with the school board to allow the use of school facilities by the general public.

Policy 5.3.1.1: The City of Punta Gorda will coordinate with the School Board to permit the joint use of school sites and City facilities with similar facility needs, such as libraries, parks and recreation facilities, health care facilities, and emergency shelters.

***Measurement:** The adoption of any joint-use agreements.*