

# III. Level of Service



As requirement of the City's Comprehensive Plan 2025, the Parks and Recreation Master Plan must:

- be completed in 2010 and provide an inventory of existing and proposed park sites;
- evaluate each site for its design as a passive or active park\*;
- evaluate how the community wants to use each park (for festivals, art markets, relaxing, sports activities, etc) with amenities added accordingly; and
- evaluate its level of service (LOS) to the residents through the Florida State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) a set of standards developed by the Division of Recreation and Parks of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection as well as the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) standards.

\* In reviewing the industry standard established by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) and the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) staff realized that these principles were more conducive to a larger Park System and were intended to be used as guidelines for use at a local level. However since there is no national standard the number of acres of parkland for 1,000 persons, it is recommended that the community determine a level of service that is acceptable to their Park System vision.



In order to analyze the existing Park System a Level of Service must be established. This existing system analysis will form the baseline data which will be used as part of the tracking system to gauge the progression toward the goals identified in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. Historically the Level of Service for components of a Park System has been measured on a simple acres 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. Over the past decade a number of studies by local governments, universities, and others have illustrated the personal, environmental, social, and economic benefits associated by being within  $\frac{1}{4}$  -  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile radius of a park.

These benefits will promote the City's sense of place by providing a strong foundation on which the Parks & Recreation System can grow and develop as identified by the stakeholders meeting, creating a boater's destination and increasing business opportunities. This development is essential for a sustainable community. Our health, community, economy and environment all benefit from investments in parks and recreation opportunities.



# Personal Benefits



The experience of learning something new enables people to develop personal life and job skills. Fun leisure opportunities for young and old stir spontaneous activity and playful imagination which allows development of self esteem and positive self image. These feelings nurture personal and community relationships and help develop balance between work and play. This balanced lifestyle creates life long memories, promotes individual fitness and wellness and energizes the community base to be active in their City.

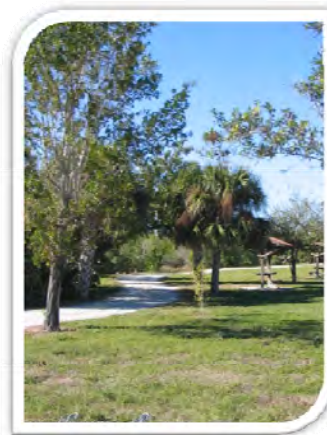
- Recreation opportunities for safe boating, sailing, chess tournaments, bocce ball and tennis
- Facilities that are inviting, accessible and that bring people together
- Parks that provide unique experiences
- Indoor & outdoor centers that advance wellness activities and promote personal health & fitness



# Environmental Benefits



Access to the natural environment is an important component of the resource-based or eco-tourism market of the City. Protecting these natural resources helps define the City's identity. Clean waterways encourage people to fish, boat, or kayak while environmental lands of pine forests and prairie lands encourage people to hike and bicycle. Connection to greenspaces and the various recreational opportunities contribute to the quality of life, increase property values, and promote economic development in Punta Gorda.



- Connections to the natural environment increases and improves our quality of life
- Trees reduce carbon dioxide, produce oxygen, filter out pollution and conserve energy
- Public educational information for residents and businesses about best practices tree species selection, fertilizing, and pruning
- Interpretive displays in open space areas about local ecosystems will educate visitors about the natural environment
- Presentation of classes available to community promoting "green concepts"



# Social Benefits



Recreation allows the community to promote their ethnic and cultural history. A variety of leisure opportunities, facilities and the quality of the local surroundings are the foundations of community pride. The ability to gather, relax and socialize together builds not only strong families and friends but also builds a strong interconnected society. Strong societies support community involvement and shared management and ownership of the resource have been shown to reduce anti-social behaviors and loneliness in individuals.

- Community facilities accessible for groups that provide afterschool programs for children & teens
- Community buildings as gathering places that provide source of civic information
- Interconnected park system to reflect uniqueness of neighborhoods and which celebrate diversity
- Partner with schools, community based organizations and other public agencies
- Civic involvement through community meetings, volunteer opportunities and neighborhood activities





# Economic Benefit



There are numerous economic benefits gained in a community with a well developed Park System. These services are often the catalyst for tourism, a major component of our economy.

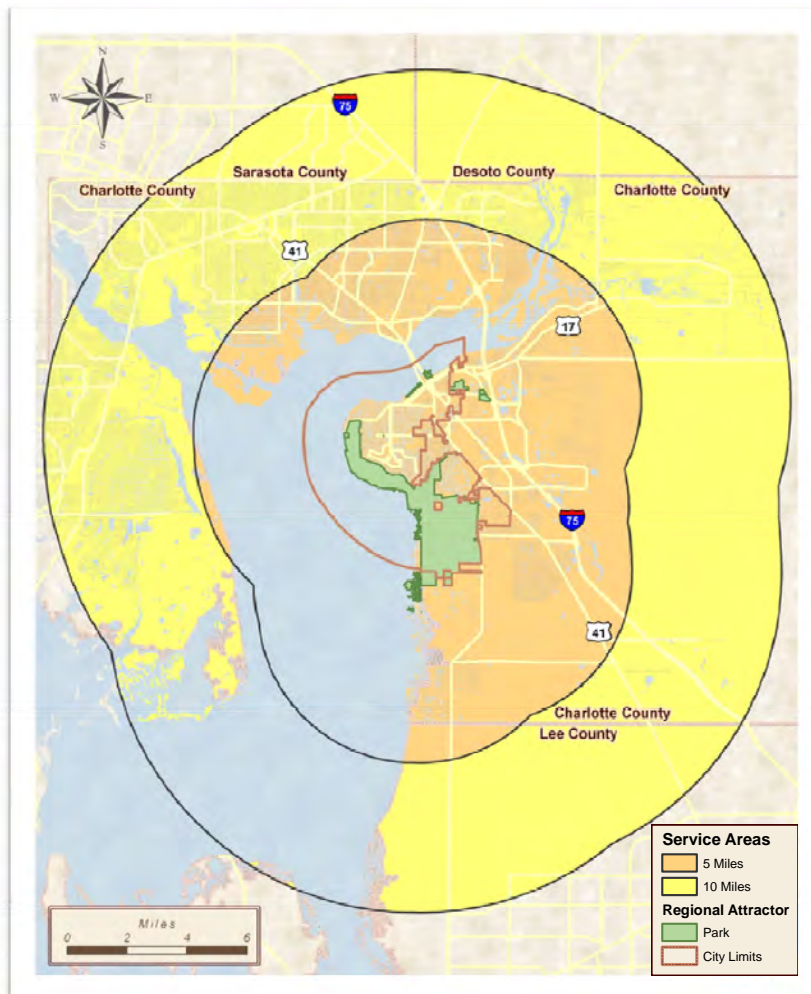
- Maintained parks, open space, recreation facilities, and services promote active use and increase property values
- Capitalize on resource based tourism opportunities
- Promote unique local events in marketing strategies to maximize positive economic impact
- Provide diversity in parks and facilities to promote opportunities for people of all ages to increase regional tourism

Parks and recreation services motivate business relocation and expansion in the community. The purchases of equipment for leisure experiences increase local retail sales. A benefit expressed by the Citizens during the Charrette.

Visitors coming to view an exhibit or participate in an event can spend millions on hotels, shopping and dining. Meaningful leisure services reduce the high cost of vandalism and criminal activity.



# Regional & Environmental Parks



The City of Punta Gorda currently relies on the Charlotte County Parks System for the provision of Regional Park facilities. South County Regional Recreation Center and Carmalita Athletic Park provide the City with sufficient access to athletic fields, Skate Park, BMX track, recreational center and public pool facilities. The Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center (CHEC) provides the regional environmental educational component serving both local and regional populations. In addition, the City's waterfront parks (Gilchrist, Laishley, and Ponce De leon) serve as a regional attraction for parts of Charlotte, Sarasota, Desoto & Lee County. The adjacent map identifies the parks that serves as regional attractors.

Level of Service shall be:

- 5 mile radius (Primary Service Area)
- 10 mile (Secondary Service Area)



**South County Regional Recreation  
Center & Pool**



**Carmalita Athletic Park**



Environmental Parks serve as Punta Gorda's historic connection to Charlotte Harbor and form the foundation of the community's understanding of the need to preserve the natural environment. Without significant preservation of environmentally sensitive lands in 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 the economically sustainable solution not just the environmentally sustainable one. It is with this in mind that Punta Gorda seeks to establish a closer relationship with the natural environment through the sensitive development of these areas for greater public enjoyment and understanding.



**Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center**



# Urban Parks

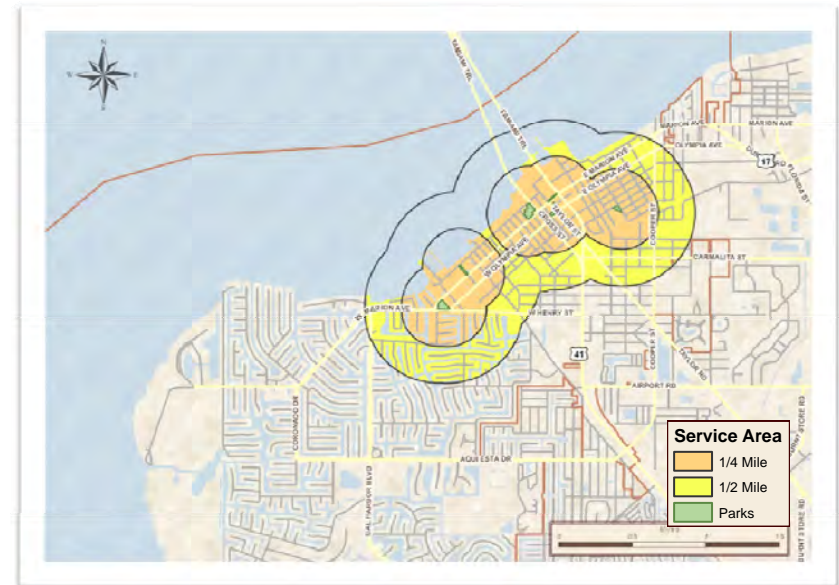


Urban Parks are the public cornerstone of any great urban environment. The Urban Park provides a green relief from the intensity and excitement of the urban landscape. This green relief creates a public gathering place for the exchange of ideas and the random social interactions that provide the lifeblood of a city, town, or village.

Level of Service shall be:

- ¼ mile radius (Primary Service Area)
- ½ mile (Secondary Service Area)

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.



Herald Court Plaza



Pittman Park Extension

# Waterfront Parks



Waterfront Parks such as Gilchrist, Laishley & Ponce de Leon, serve regional and local users. Citizen and Council input seeks to increase recreational opportunities and restore some of the historical activities that once occurred along the waterfronts. These ideas are being developed as a secondary product of this 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 mile – ½ mile radius can walk/bicycle to utilize the parks.

Level of Service shall be:

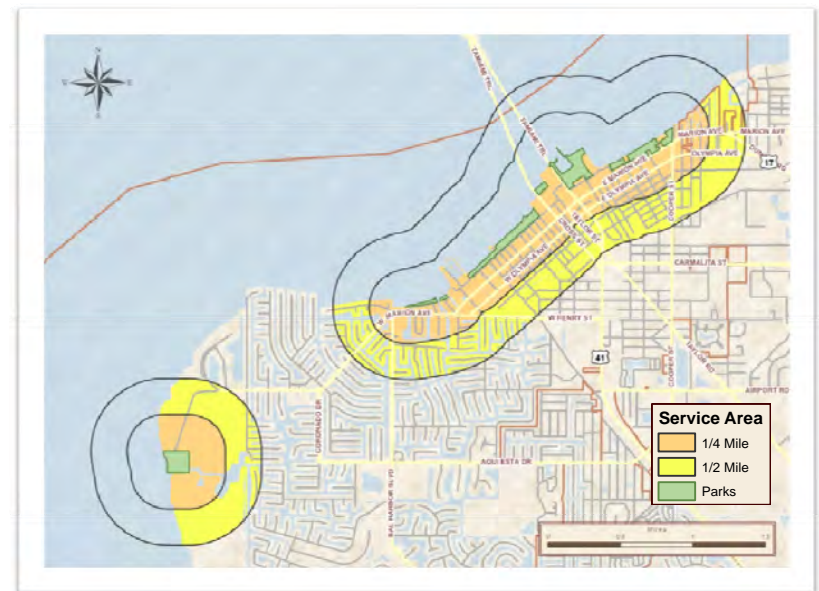
- ¼ mile radius (Primary Service Area)
- ½ mile (Secondary Service Area)



**Gilchrist Park**



**Laishley Park**



# Neighborhood Parks



Neighborhood Parks generally serve a small geography with the park amenities deemed vital to the function of that particular neighborhood. These facilities should occur within a reasonable walking/biking distance of the neighborhood it is intended to serve.

Level of Service shall be:

- ¼ mile radius (Primary Service Area)
- ½ mile (Secondary Service Area)

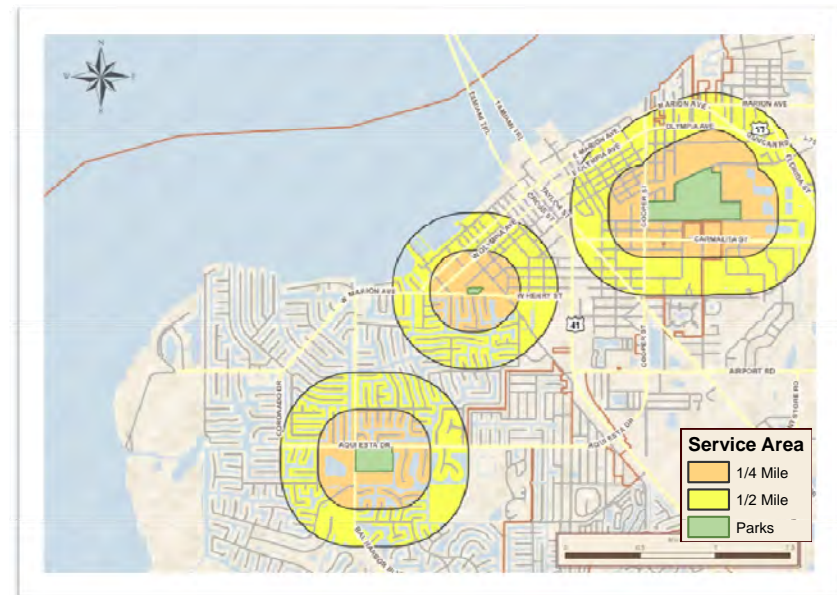
It is vital to understand the conditions, uses and functions that make a park an integral part of a neighborhood. Neighborhood Parks are rare within the context of the existing Punta Gorda Parks System. As identified on the adjacent map Hounds on Henry, Nature Park, and South County Regional Recreation 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.



Nature Park



Hounds on Henry



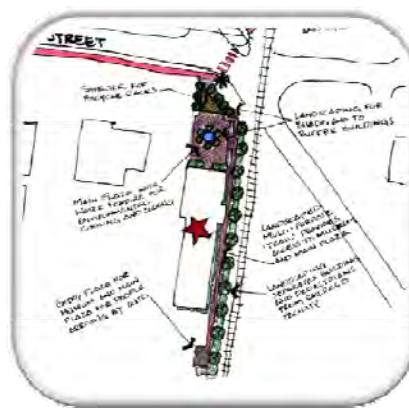
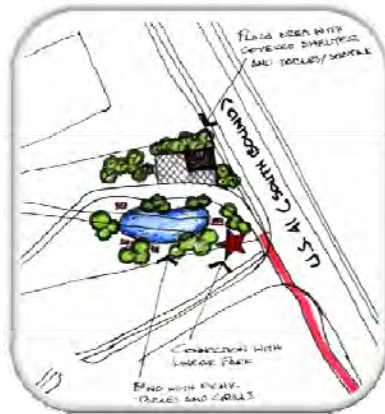
# Linear Parks



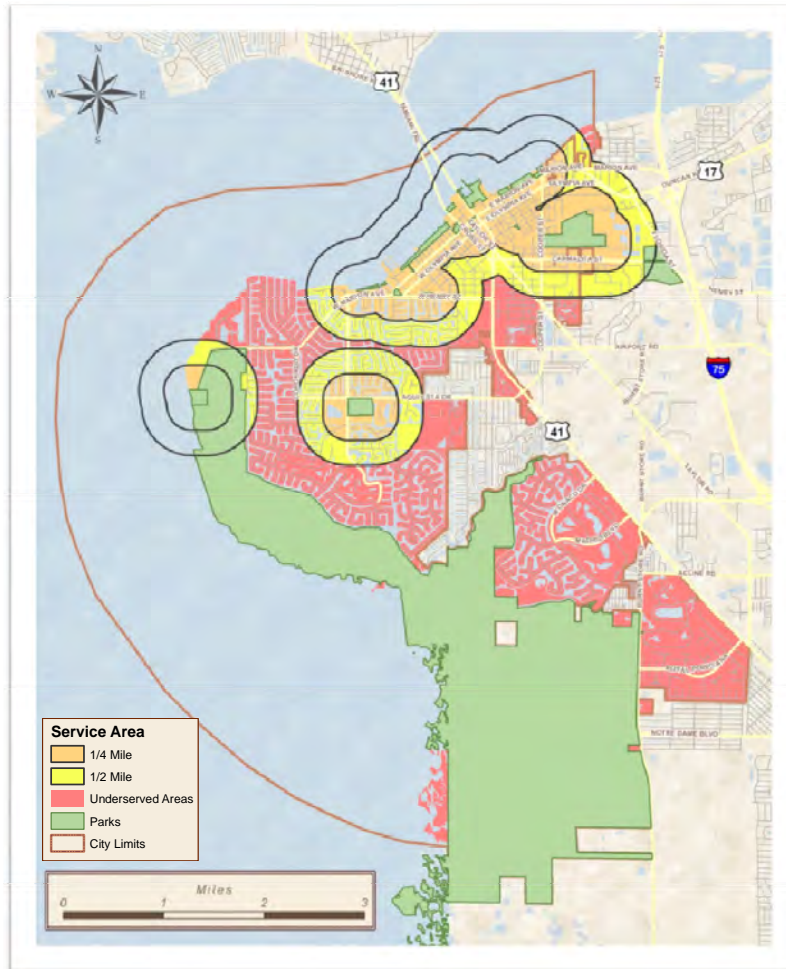
Linear Parks serve the vital function of connecting the varied park types to each other and to the communities they serve. They are designed to move residents and visitors safely and logically through the Park System in a seamless manner. This linkage was the general consensus among the citizens and business owners surveyed during the Charrette. The proximity to these facilities is a good secondary determining factor of quality of life within the context of the Parks System. These facilities should occur within a reasonable walking/biking distance of the neighborhoods they are intended to serve. There are currently no Linear Parks in the City, however many are in the planning, engineering or construction phases and once completed, will be a major component of the Ring Around the City.

The Level of Service shall be:

- ¼ mile radius (Primary Service Area)
- ½ mile (Secondary Service Area).



# Current Needs Analysis

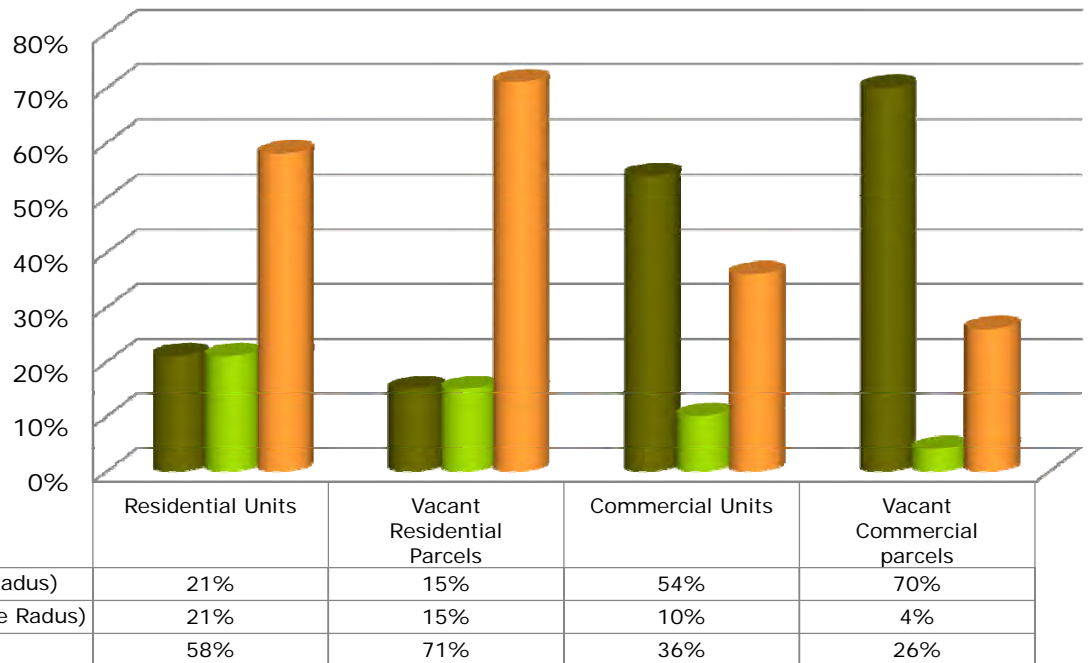
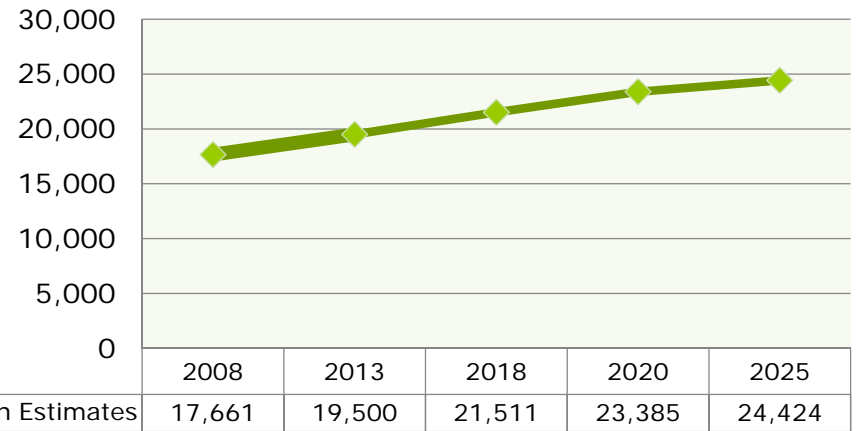


In order to determine the City's current performance, a needs analysis was completed based on the proximity of residential and commercial units to the existing Park System. The existing City Parks were identified and 1/4 mile primary service area, in orange, and 1/2 mile radius secondary service area, in yellow, was drawn around each park. Using this basis for analysis, the red areas of the map indicate areas that are considered underserved.

The adjacent table identifies the number and percentage of housing units and commercial parcels that lie within & outside the existing service areas. This data was derived from Property Appraiser data and analyzed based on the service areas generated by City staff. The table identifies 42% residential units within the City occur within the primary or secondary service area of at least one park. The remaining 58% of the City's residential population occurs in areas identified as underserved by the existing Park System.

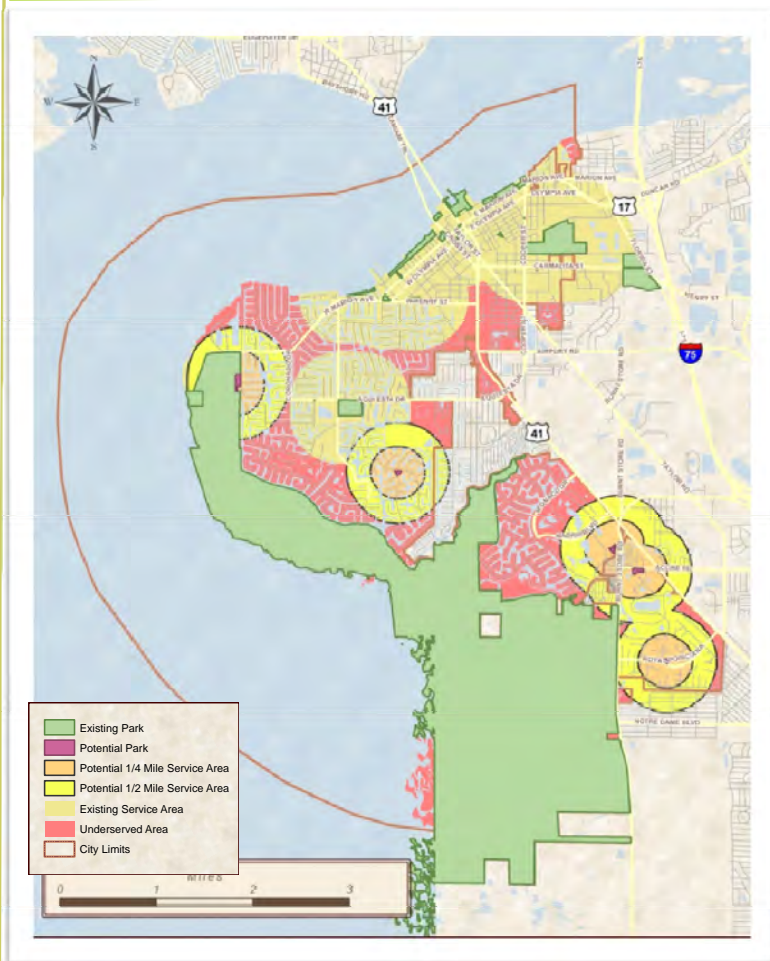
A full 30 % of vacant land available for residential development occurs within the primary and/or secondary service area; the remaining 70% of vacant residential land in underserved areas. This information is critical in planning for future parks because as residential development occurs, the associated population growth will place additional stress on the existing Park System.

The Table also identifies that 64% of developed commercial properties occur within a primary or secondary service area with the remaining 36% occurring in underserved areas. Additionally, 26% of vacant commercial properties occur in underserved areas. These vacant commercial parcels represent opportunities for public/private partnerships to provide additional parks as they become developed.



■ Primary Service Areas (1/4 Mile Radius)	21%	15%	54%	70%
■ Secondary Service Areas (1/2 Mile Radius)	21%	15%	10%	4%
■ Under Served Areas (City Limits)	58%	71%	36%	26%

# Future Opportunities Analysis



The personal, environmental, social, and economic benefits associated with close proximity to parks have been identified; the City shall establish its Level of Service (LOS) standards for the park types-Regional, Environmental, Urban, Waterfront, Neighborhood, and Linear and evaluate 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 another critical component 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. In order to meet this current and future need every undeveloped or underdeveloped City owned 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. The map identifies potential future neighborhood park locations that could serve the current unmet community needs.

Reviewing the survey data collected, 76% of park users surveyed identified walking and 28% of park users identified bicycling as the primary reason for visiting a Punta Gorda park. Residents and businesses surveyed through this Parks & Recreation Master Plan process, want better and safer pedestrian/bicycle connections between neighborhoods, businesses, parks and the waterfront.

Once developed Linear Park facilities will provide the connections necessary to complete the Ring Around the City, and will connect or create a linkage between the Park System and neighborhoods and commercial communities.

- Personal Benefits
  - Provide increased health and wellness opportunities
  - Connect underserved areas through the Ring Around the City
  - Provide intergenerational recreation opportunities
- Environmental Benefits
  - Increase natural habitat by planting native trees and plants
  - Reduce heat island effect and local air pollution through increased tree planting
  - Provide educational opportunities for residents and businesses on landscape care best management practices
- Social Benefit
  - Make surrounding neighborhoods more desirable
  - Increase social and cultural opportunities by partnering with schools, community organizations & other public agencies
  - Interconnect communities through the Ring Around the City
- Economic Benefit
  - Build tourism through unique community events
  - Increase economic opportunity by attracting regional visitors
  - Enhance economic sustainability through public-private partnerships for parks

