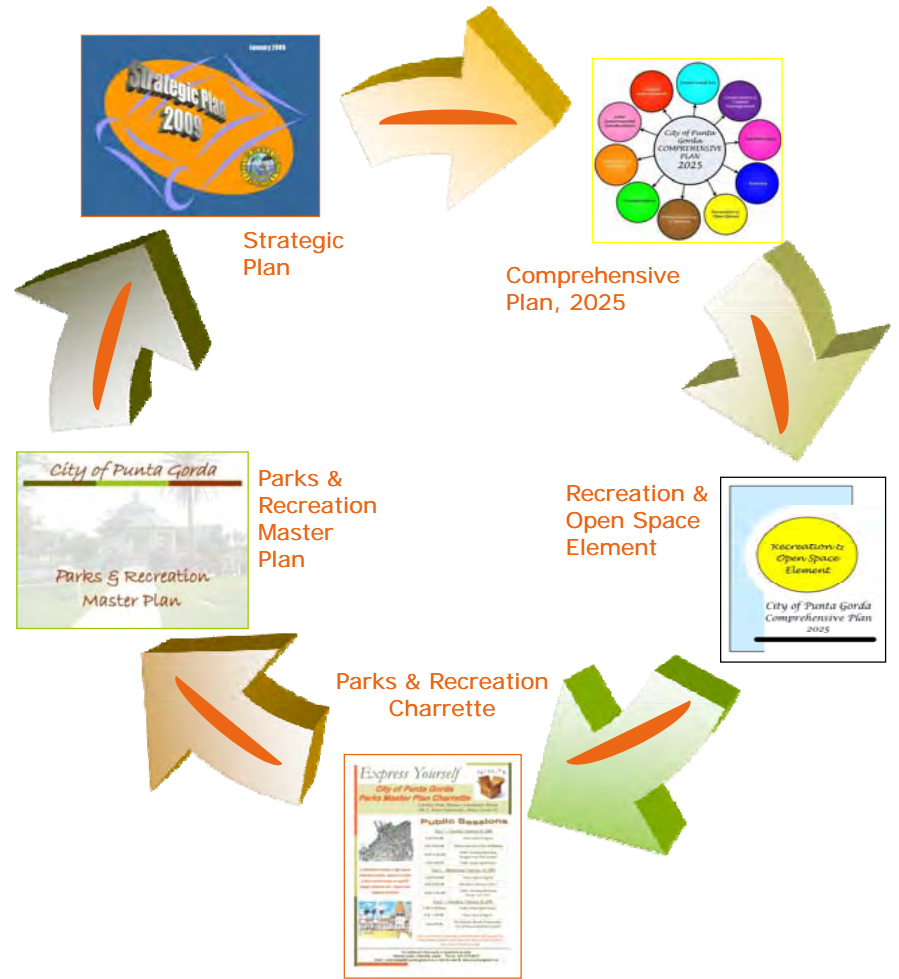


II. Introduction

As part of the City of Punta Gorda's Comprehensive Plan 2025, the City is required to complete a "Parks & Recreation Master Plan". The Plan will review the City's current and future delivery of recreation services as it relates to the City's growing population and as a vital component of the continued economic sustainability of the City. 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 and changing demographic and economic trends, a wide variety of recreational activities are needed. This fact was demonstrated through the public input received at the "City of Punta Gorda's Parks & Recreation Master Plan Charrette." While retirees continue to be the dominant component of population growth, increasing numbers of families of various income levels will choose to live and work in Punta Gorda; thereby, leading to continued demand for a variety of recreational facilities, organized open space and other recreation related activities.



The natural beauty of Charlotte Harbor attracts residents and visitors alike with stunning vistas and dynamic waterfront views and activities. Connecting the residents and the neighborhoods to the waterfront and other park areas is crucial in achieving a sustainable park system and is a major objective of the community. This need, first identified in the 1990's, was crystallized into a tangible vision identified in the Mayor's 2008 State of City Address as the Ring Around the City. Encircling the City, this connection of multi-use recreational trails, linear parks and the Harborwalk will link key destinations, improve pedestrian and bicycling connectivity and enhance economic vitality of the core commercial areas. This project promotes the utilization of underdeveloped existing parks and creates access avenues for destination places, destination places provide venues for entertainment, waterfront activities, historical sites and meeting places serving both residents and tourists. In addition, destination places are critical in promoting a variety of personal, environmental, social and economical benefits which will improve the City's overall quality of life.



Impact fees, ad valorem taxes, and optional one cent sales tax revenues are the City's principal funding sources for parks and recreation facilities. A host of federal and state funding sources exist for capital improvement—mostly in the form of competitive grants. Other funding opportunities exist through the creation of public private partnerships and establishment of park specific non-profit management organizations, and similar innovative techniques.



Gilchrist Park

Nature Park



Lashley Park

Ponce de Leon Park



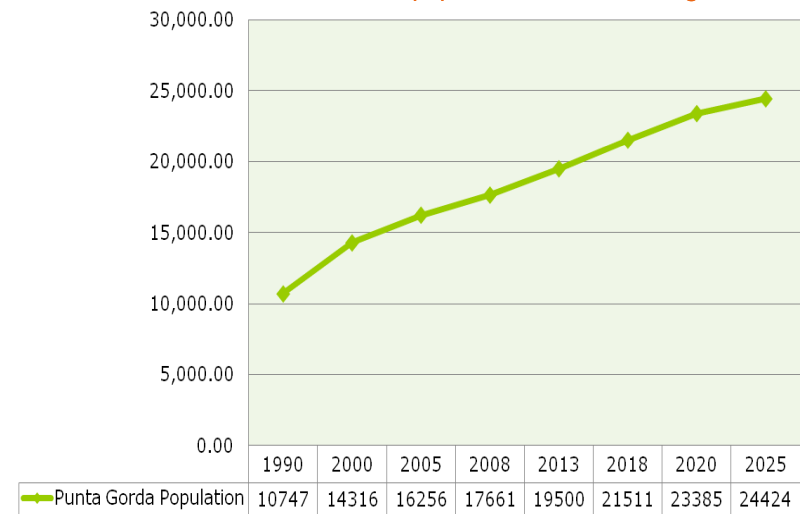
"The key to developing a successful park system is to determine community needs and preferences, and to adopt level of service (LOS) standards for those needs which, when implemented, will provide the land, facilities, and programs in locations that serve and satisfy the public."

-City of Punta Gorda Comprehensive Plan, 2025

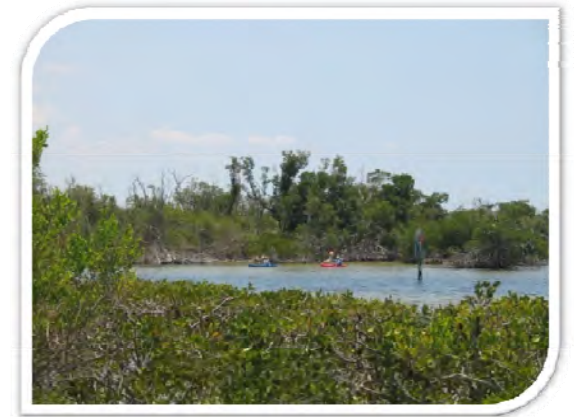
The Parks and Recreation Master Plan will establish Level of Service (LOS) standards for a variety of park typologies, and establish an implementation strategy with short, intermediate and long range projects to achieve the communities goals. Furthermore, the technical appendix will provide details for organizational structure and design standards providing a firm foundation for the development of the Parks System in keeping with the vision identified through the City's Parks & Recreation Master Plan Charrette, Surveys and other public input. Many of these ideas and details for the Master Plan were gathered from numerous stakeholder meetings. These meetings were arranged by staff with a variety of local organizations, businesses, and community partners to establish a community commitment for future projects.

Punta Gorda Population Growth

Additional facilities and services will be needed as the population continues to grow.



Source: City of Punta Gorda Comprehensive Plan, 2025



Vision



“Advancing the quality of life through the creation of a comprehensive interconnected and sustainable Park System that promotes the unique character and environment of Punta Gorda”

Mission

In order to achieve this vision and serve a diverse population drawn from across the country and around the world, thereby promoting long term personal, environmental, social and economic benefit, and the preservation of our historic legacy, the Parks System must be:

** Interconnected * Sustainable * Unique **

The City of Punta Gorda Parks and Recreation Master Plan serves as a declaration of values and a foundation on which to build our Parks System. The Plan looks in a comprehensive way at the existing system. Specific sections address and assess the existing Park System, summarize public input, define specific park types and associated design standards, develop implementation strategies and technical appendices.

A current assessment of existing conditions formed the baseline data for engaging with the citizenry in determining community needs and desires for the Park System. An interactive multiday planning meeting known as a charrette was conducted, along with stakeholder meetings, interactive website, and user survey to engage the citizens. These public participation tools established an open forum for the community to self-identify the existing needs and desires, and start to address the opportunities and the challenges presented by the existing Parks System.



Through the assessment and initial citizen input process a clearer picture of the park needs were identified. These needs translated into a language of park types Regional, Environmental, Urban, Waterfront, Neighborhood, and Linear. These basic typologies along with a language of pedestrian, bicycle, vehicular and water connections can serve as the logical building blocks for the Parks System.



These basic park types are defined in terms of needs, stakeholders and design standards. The firm understanding of the park types and the conceptual map of the proposed system offer a starting point for determining a sustainable implementation strategy. This strategy provides a clear incremental set of short, intermediate, and long term steps that will move the parks toward the community desired vision of an interconnected, sustainable and unique Park System.



Values



Interconnective

Every element of the Park System shall visually and physically reinforce the understanding of the parks as a system vital to the community.



Accessible

Every resident shall be able to safely and comfortably walk or bicycle from their home to parks, community facilities, commercial areas, and schools.

Sustainable

Every action and improvement in the Park System shall contribute to the personal, environmental, social and economic prosperity of the City.



Unique

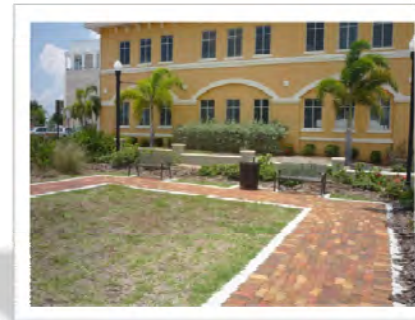
Every public space shall be designed to compliment the natural, historic, and cultural landscape of the City.



Goals



- Offer a wider variety of water based activities throughout the Park System
- Maintain the unique small town, old Florida charm of Punta Gorda through the preservation and reinforcement of Historic Resources
- Provide and encourage public spaces to soften the urban landscape - to put the right park, with the right amenities, in the right neighborhood
- Provide tree-lined avenues to connect parks, neighborhoods and community destinations
- Utilize multi-use recreational trails that connect parks, neighborhoods, civic places and other community destinations



- Design parks to accommodate multi-generational recreational needs
- As transit becomes available, utilize it to reinforce community access to the Park System
- Encourage events and activities in the parks to enliven the public realm.
- Provide opportunities for continued economic and social development and sustainability
- To ensure conservation areas and critical habitats are protected and preserved
- Enhance existing and underdeveloped parks to maximize potential and increase neighborhood benefits



How The Master Plan Will be Used

As the City of Punta Gorda continues to grow, citizens will want to experience a variety of activities and places along the waterfront, downtown area, and within natural environments. This plan serves as a guideline to foster and develop positive relationships that engage the community both physically and psychologically. The plan, when completed, will be used by:

The Public:

- To learn about the parks & facilities;
- Understand benefits & services
- Understand city decisions
- Utilize more parks than just the main three (Laishley, Gilchrist & Ponce de Leon)

Developers

- Define Parks/ Recreation Facilities
- Determine baseline development standards for facilities
- Understand Park development process
- Guide for project/ community designs

City Partners

- Meet identified gaps in facilities or programs
- Set policy framework for partnerships with the City
- Compare services to avoid duplication

City Staff

- Guide daily decisions based on adopted policy
- Plan workload and resource needs
- Promote benefits of parks and recreation
- Plan for ways to fill gaps
- Utilize current park facility inventory
- Establish baseline to measure success

Citizen Advisory Committees

- Promote parks and recreation in the City
- Advocate for priorities from public surveys
- Develop policy framework for Citizen Advisory Committees business/priorities
- Establish baseline to measure success

City Council

- Direct priorities for Parks & Recreation Services
- Guide planning for expected growth, land use, and public services
- Understand public issues and desires
- Identify funding gaps

Challenges & Opportunities



■ **Challenges**

- Organizational structure
- Financial conditions
- Lack of neighborhood parks
- Pre-existing platted lands
- Auto orientated corridors
- Underdeveloped park lands
- Environmental constraints
- Lack of park land in the Southern part of the City

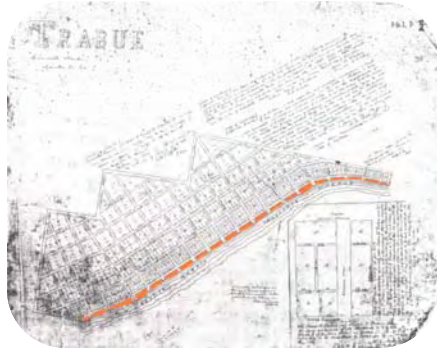
■ **Opportunities**

- Underdeveloped waterfront parks
- Community desire
- Quality park systems
- Environmental resources
- Historical resources
- Destination City
- Unique urban environment

Key Events Shaping the Park System



1885



Isaac Trabue dedicates 30 acres along Charlotte Harbor waterfront as Public Park Lands (Trabue Park)

1887

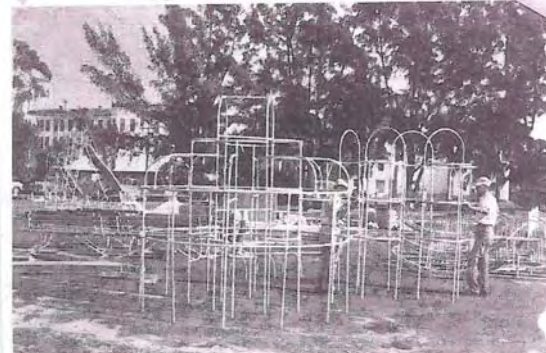
City of Punta Gorda incorporated at "Hectors Billiard Parlor and Drug Store"



1921

A portion of Trabue Park is renamed "Gilchrist Park" in honor of Florida Governor Albert Walter Gilchrist, one of the City's founding fathers

Playground Equipment Arrives



Pictured above is a part of the equipment now being assembled for the new playground at Bayfront Park. Mrs. Arthur Smadbeck, president of the Hecksher Foundation for Children, which donated the equipment, will be here Feb. 17, and it is hoped that the dedication can be held at that time. Mayor J. McCann and County Commissioner Vasco Peoples were responsible for obtaining the Hecksher equipment.

1966

The City of Punta Gorda donated 10 acres of land to Charlotte County to construct a public auditorium



1
9
6
7



"City Beach" is renamed "Juan Ponce De leon Park" in honor of Ponce De Leon, explorer of Florida

1
9
9
1



City begins acquiring sections of "Trabue Park" located along Patti Avenue

1
9
7
8

King Park- Municipal Mobil Home Park is renamed to "Phil Laishley Park" honoring the former mayor's vision of a Municipal Marina



2
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Through grant funding the City acquires environmental lands within the Punta Gorda Isles plat to create "Nature Park" recreational trails and observation areas throughout the underdeveloped pine palmetto forest and salt/high marsh habitats



2
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1



City redevelops land for "Herald Court Plaza"

2003

Improvements begin at "Sculpture Park"



2004

"Hounds on Henry" is constructed as an off leash public dog park



2005

City acquires additional parcels for "Trabue Park" located along Patti Avenue



2006



The AC Freeman house built in 1903 is restored and relocated to Government Center

"Hector House Plaza" is constructed at the former site of the "Hector Billiard Parlor and Drug Store"



2007

Major improvements including 400 foot fishing pier, boat docks, boat ramp, parking facilities and marina building are constructed at "Laishley Park"



Public parking and plaza are constructed at "Government Center" home to Historic City Hall, and AC Freeman House



The City and The School Board of Charlotte County enter into a joint partnership for "Baker Park"



2008



A public private partnership with Cedar Village Condominiums to build the "Pittman Park Expansion"

The "Charlotte Harbor Event and Conference Center" is completed



2009

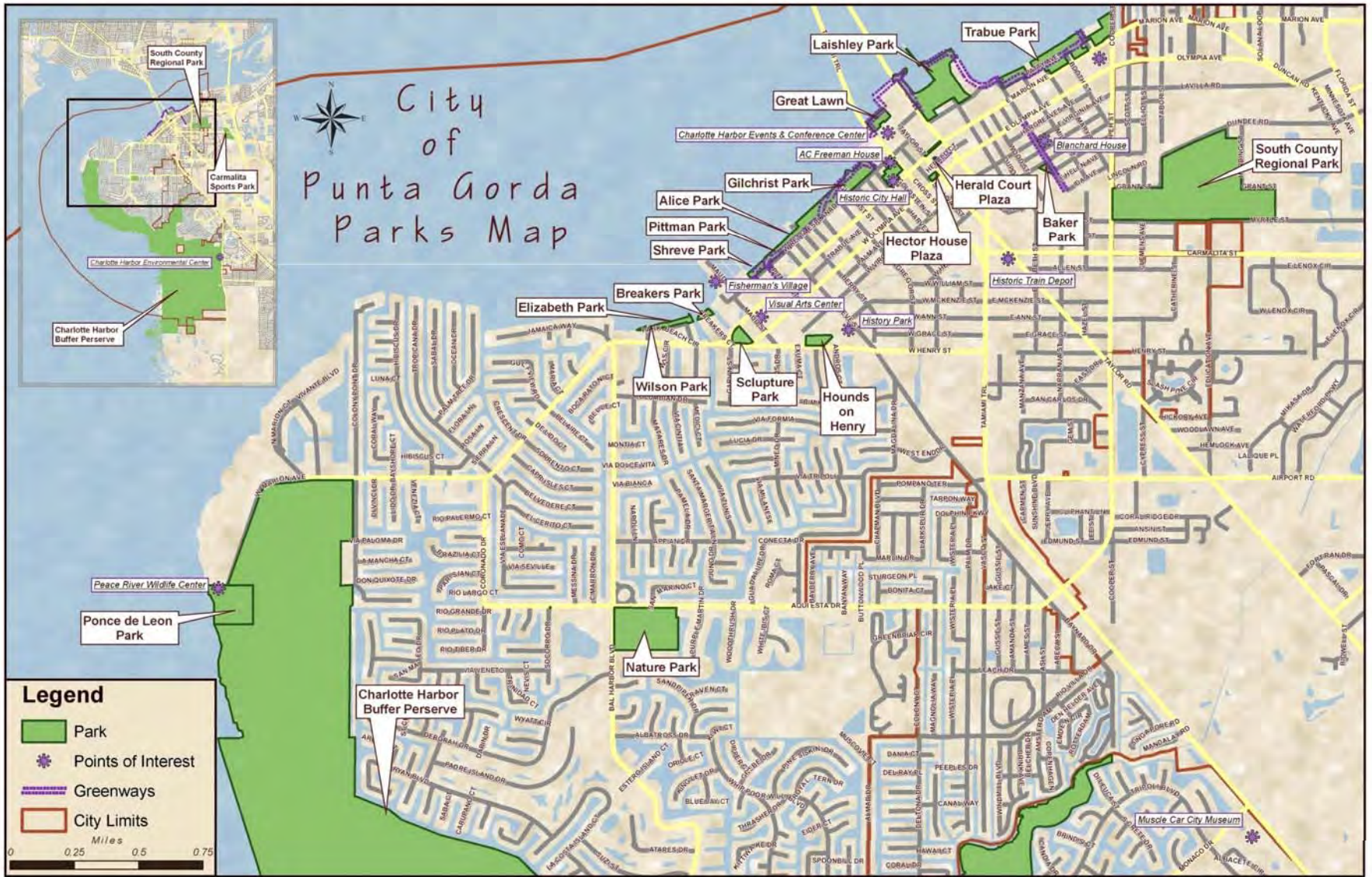


Entertainment stage, restroom facilities, open air pavilions and interactive fountain are constructed at "Laishley Park"

City Park Map & Amenities



Park Name	Location	Basketball Court	Beach	Bird Watching	Boardwalk	Boat Ramp	Exercise Area	Fishing	Fishing Pier	Gazebo	Marina	Mult-Use recreational Trail	Nature Trail	Open Space	Parking	Park Bench Area	Playground	Pet on Leash	Picnic Area	Picnic Shelter	Restroom	Scenic Overlook	Tennis
Alice Park	W Retta Esplanade											✓										✓	
Baker Park	Martin Luther King Blvd & Charlotte Ave													✓	✓	✓							✓
Breakers Park	W Retta Esplanade											✓											✓
Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center (CHEC)	10941 Burnt Store Road			✓	✓								✓		✓	✓					✓	✓	
Elizabeth Park	W Retta Esplanade											✓											✓
Gilchrist Park	1000 W Retta Esplanade	✓						✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Government Center	126 Harvey Street																						
Great Lawn at Charlotte Harbor Event & Conference Center	75 Taylor Street											✓		✓	✓	✓							✓
Hector House Plaza	Taylor Street														✓	✓							
Hounds on Henry (fenced off-lease dog park)	Shreve Street														✓	✓		✓					
Laishley Park	Laishley Court				✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Nature Park	1555 Aquí Esta Drive			✓	✓								✓	✓	✓	✓			✓				✓
Pittman Park & Extension	W Retta Esplanade											✓				✓							✓
Ponce de Leon Park	Ponce de Leon Parkway		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
South County Regional Park	670 Cooper Street													✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		
Sculpture Park	Corner of Henry & Marion											✓				✓							✓
Shreve Park	802 W Retta Esplanade											✓											✓
Trabue Park	Patti Avenue				✓									✓	✓	✓							✓
Wilson Park	W Retta Esplanade											✓											✓



Points of Interest



Punta Gorda has several points of interest that form a vital part of the Park System. These unique places provide social, cultural and environmental opportunities that will enrich the park experience.

AC Freeman House

311 W Retta Esplanade

The A. C. Freeman House is a typical Victorian Style house built in 1903 from a Sears & Roebuck Catalog kit. In 1987, it was added to the U.S. National Register of Historic Places. Currently the home serves as a museum and as the offices for the Charlotte County Chamber of Commerce and the Punta Gorda Historical Society.



Charlotte Harbor Event & Conference Center

75 Taylor Street

This 44,000-square-foot facility built in 2007 features a modern and open floor space design that lends itself to endless event layouts. Located in the heart of the City on the "Harborwalk" it offers panoramic views, of Charlotte Harbor from the Great Lawn.



Visual Art Center

210 Maud Street

The Visual Arts Center serves Punta Gorda, Charlotte County and beyond, with three major galleries, an extensive art library, and a gift shop of unique, hand crafted items.



Blanchard House

406 Dr. Martin Luther King Blvd

This 1925 house was originally built for Joseph Blanchard, a black sea captain and key member of early Punta Gorda's business community, and Minnie, his mail-order bride. Upon the death of Blanchard's last surviving daughter, local African-American historian, Bernice Russell, purchased the Blanchard House. Since Russell's death, the museum has been operated as an open access, educational institute devoted to the procurement, preservation, study and display of artifacts and materials related to the history, culture and contributions of African Americans in Charlotte County.



Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center (CHEC)

10941 Burnt Store Road

The Charles E. Caniff visitors' reception center, offers an excellent view of native Florida upland and fresh water wetland ecosystems. The Center contains exhibits describing the natural habitats in the area, a Native American exhibit, a bald eagle's nest, and a small reference library. Other facilities on site include several pavilions, a Wildlife Observatory, a Native Butterfly Garden and miles of trails through the unspoiled beauty of natural Southwest Florida.

Fishermen's Village

1200 W Retta Esplanade

Fishermen's Village is a unique harborside shopping experience with a marina and vacation resort. Built on the site of the former municipal pier, the facility was designed to replicate a traditional fishing village. A series of wooden buildings house several dozen boutiques, gift stores, and six restaurants which provide dining with harbor and marina views. Adjoining the mall is a 97 slip marina, where sightseeing cruises, boat rentals and fishing charters are available. Fishermen's Village is a tourist and local destination that hosts entertainment and a weekly farmers market in the village "center court".



History Park

501 Shreve St

History Park, a facility operated by Punta Gorda Historical Society, is a nine acre park located in the central part of the City that serves as a relocation site for historically significant structures saved from demolition. Structures on site include the Trabue Land Sale Office, the Cigar Cottage, and the home formerly operated as the Gilchrist Bed and Breakfast.



Historic City Hall

326 W Marion Ave

The town was originally named "Trabue" for the town's founder, Isaac Trabue who platted the site in 1885 and incorporated in 1887. Punta Gorda, the only incorporated City in Charlotte County, was founded almost 40 years prior to the 1921 establishment of Charlotte County. City Hall built in 1926 continues to serve as City offices displays many historic photographs chronicling life in early Punta Gorda.



Muscle Car City Museum

3811 Tamiami Trail

Muscle Car City contains almost 100,000 square feet museum space, displaying well over 200 vintage muscle cars. The collection boasts GM Performance Cars from the early 1950's thru the 1970's as well as a huge assortment of Hot Rods and Antique Chevys from other eras.



Historic Train Depot

1009 Taylor Rd

The Punta Gorda Depot was built in 1928 in a Mission Revival architectural style, for the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad. The Depot is the only remaining of six identical depots built for the railroad in the first quarter of the 20th century in Florida. The Depot is currently operated by the Punta Gorda Historical Society as a museum focused on local history, archaeology, and ecology, as well as an antique mall containing unique treasures for sale.



Peace River Wildlife Center

3400 W Marion Ave – (Ponce de Leon Park)

The Peace River Wildlife Center is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the care, preservation and protection of Charlotte County's native wildlife. The center is open daily and offers tours of display areas which include many waterfowl and birds of prey that are too injured to be returned to the wild.

Greenways



Traditionally “greenways” are linear open space established along either a natural corridor or along man made right-of-way used for pedestrian or biking purposes. Greenway trails provide recreation, transportation, fitness, and economic benefits for all to enjoy. The Ring Around The City system of greenways will link the existing Park System through the development of multi-use recreational trails, linear connections and the completion of the Harborwalk. This connection was a common theme shared by many of the stakeholders who participated in the Charette.

Greenways are usually:

- linear public corridors for pedestrians and cyclists
- Conduits to parks, nature reserves, cultural features, historic sites, neighborhoods and retail areas

The City’s Greenways provide:

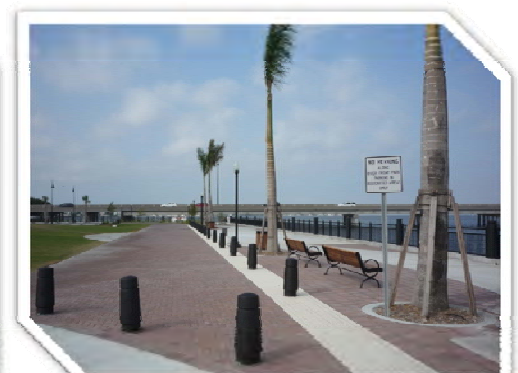
- a variety of links which connect waterfront promenades, urban walks, environmental trails, sidewalks, and bike paths
- opportunities for the expansion of urban recreation
- alternate ways to move through the city
- visitors the experience of nature, community and urban life



Ring Around The City



- Harborwalk



- Linear Park



- Multi-Use Recreational Trail (MURT)



Linear Park Amenities to include:

- Park Benches
- Exercise Equipment
- Shade Structures
- Drinking Fountains
- Education Information
- Directional Signage
- Trail Head Parking
- Bocce Ball Courts
- Landscaping
- Garden Areas

Blueways



Similar to greenways, “blueways” are water paths or trails that are developed with launch points and points of interest for canoeists and kayakers. They provide recreational opportunities, cultural and environmental awareness, in a boat friendly atmosphere with a low environmental impact.



Creating a Blueway Involves:

1. intergovernmental coordination among federal, state and local entities,
2. installation of physical markers along the trails
3. partnerships between local and regional tourism and business groups



Blueways are usually:

- developed in quiet still bodies of water
- encourage family recreation, ecological education and preservation of our natural resources
- located in areas that feature nearby amenities for paddlers

Blueways provide an enormous amount of recreational opportunities:

- interconnectivity between residents and natural resources, green spaces, historical archeological and cultural sites
- promotes social interaction
- promotes health and wellness
- promotes historical, cultural and environmental education