

SECTION 2

PARK DESCRIPTIONS and CLASSIFICATIONS

PARK LAND CATEGORIES

The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) states that: “Open space provides more than recreational opportunities; it is land that society needs to conserve as natural, cultural, historic, and agricultural resources. One of the most common misconceptions regarding open space and recreation is that the two terms are synonymous. A strong relationship does exist between open space and outdoor recreation but, in most cases, recreation is something separate and distinct from open space.” A park is open space, but open space is not necessarily a park.

The National Park and Recreation Association (NRPA) has developed six categories of open space. The Community Park District has simplified them into three recognized categories.

- a. **ENVIRONMENTAL CAPACITY** - protects natural and or cultural resources from development.
- b. **SHAPING CAPACITY** - provides relief from extensive urbanization and promotes the integration of neighborhoods. City, county, state, and federal planning agencies usually define this land as “land that shapes a community and is reflected in greenbelts, county forest preserves, state, and national parks.” This category is also reflected in local ordinances stipulating density formulas and open space requirements for subdivisions.
- c. **RECREATIONAL CAPACITY** - provides space for single or multiple, active and passive recreation activities

The acquisition and development of park land should fall into one of the categories or the project may not be within the standards of the Park District.

Regional Lands

The State of Illinois, in its Strategic Comprehensive Open Space Plan (SCORP), recognizes that the preservation of open space for active, passive, and natural resource preservation is a multi-pronged effort, needing commitment and cooperation from all levels of government.

The State seeks to develop and protect areas of large size and primary significance on a statewide level, where large budgets and crossing political boundaries are needed. Regional efforts are met by the Cook County Forest Preserve.

Local Lands

The SCORP also recognizes that park districts and municipal agencies provide a system of local land. Statewide there are 91,884 acres of locally controlled lands that directly serve communities. Local parks include a wide range of facilities for outdoor recreation, such as ball fields and sport courts, playgrounds and picnic areas, trails, swimming pools, and golf courses. Local park lands provide important green spaces in communities, often preserving features of the original community and buffering and adding to newly developing areas of communities. Most importantly, locally-provided lands are close to where people live, offering opportunities for regular recreational activities which are part of a healthy lifestyle.

In urban areas such as La Grange Park, this Master Plan states that creative ways of land reclamation will be the key to creating more open space.

- ‘Brownfield’ restoration – the reclamation of landfill, old industrial sites, or previously developed sites are opportunities, but expensive. Benefits and costs must be considered carefully.
- Acquisition and ‘knockdowns’ to provide needed land and facility sites for development – older residential properties can be acquired and added onto existing parks over time to gradually increase park size.

PARK CLASSIFICATIONS

The Community Park District's responsibilities pertain to the local recreation classifications. To this end, the Community Park District adopts the following classifications, which are:

Mini-Parks – The mini-park is used to serve isolated or limited recreational needs. Mini-parks are often tot lots; created to serve a resident population too distant from a community park or in an area with high density populations. The mini-park is approximately ¼ to 1 acre in size. Development is usually limited, requiring no parking or extensive site work. An example of a mini-park could be Beach-Oak Park.

Neighborhood Parks - Neighborhood parks are generally between 1 and 7 acres in size. They are intended to be a supplement to or a substitute for a play lot where population density, geographic barriers or distance preclude easy access. Examples of such facilities include play apparatus areas for pre-school and elementary children, hard surface areas for hopscotch, shuffleboard, tetherball, four-square and court games for basketball, volleyball, badminton, etc., and open play areas for softball, football, soccer, and winter sports. Development emphasizes spontaneous rather than higher organized play. The playground should be easily accessible to pedestrian use. Examples of neighborhood parks are Yena, Robinhood, and Stone-Monroe Parks.

Neighborhood parks may also be combined with school sites. Although any classification of park can be combined with a school, the age and activities of users makes it preferable that neighborhood parks and elementary schools are the most desirable combination. Athletic Parks are more commonly associated with Junior High Schools, where the advantage of multiple athletic fields for public as well as school use comes to play. The facilities should represent the functional needs of each agency, with the intent of satisfying one or more of the following requirements:

- (1) Avoid duplication of land and facilities unless existing facilities are over utilized;
- (2) Coordinate services, and
- (3) Diminish capital expenditures and needs of each agency. Development should be similar to the neighborhood park.

Community Parks - The community park is typically sized between 7 and 40 acres, and development is intended for people of all ages. It is preferred that the park be centrally located and serve at least four neighborhoods. Amenities found in a neighborhood park are included, and then supplemented by large open spaces for athletic games and organized sports. Internal walk patterns are desirable to connect the various functions, as well as providing pedestrian and bicycle paths. Adequate off-street parking should be provided in accordance with functions constructed. It should be accessible by motorized and non-motorized traffic. The classification may also serve as a neighborhood park facility for the area in which it is located. Memorial Park is an example of a community park.

Sports Complex - The sports complex is sized between 16 – 75 acres. It is developed to meet the needs of specific user groups and local athletic associations - for practice, team, and tournament play. These sites have adequate parking and are located on good traffic routes. They may also be located to take advantage of bicycle and pedestrian trail systems. Fields should be as multipurpose as possible, so a wide variety of flexibility can be maintained. Due to ambient noise, traffic, and potential sports lighting, athletic parks are not recommended to be located in the center of residential areas. In fact, sports complexes should be the solution to the typical problems caused by using neighborhood parks for competitive athletics. Lastly, it is best to allow for additional space when acquiring community park space, as needs and trends are subject to constant change. The closest example of a sports complex would be Hanesworth Park.

Special Use Parks - Special use parks are intended for single interest activities and are large enough to accommodate the demand, therefore size can vary from 1 to 50 acres. They may be separate from, or a part of all park classifications; or a previous classification type may be a part of a special use park. Examples are tennis centers, outdoor education centers, museums, conservatories, golf courses and practice centers, children's farm, sports complexes, skate parks, splash / spray parks, swimming pool / aquatic centers, etc. Since users are going to be drawn from a distance, the site should be near major vehicular access routes and bike trails. Again, space for expansion is desired during acquisition planning. The Community Park District does not offer a Special Use Park.

Natural Resource (Linear Greenways / Trail systems) - The Natural Resource Park (or area) is utilized as a buffer zone, watershed, or conservation area and affords a passive appearance with managed natural habitats and plant ecosystems. These areas can be used to protect fragile or rare ecosystems. Sizes range most often range between 20 to 99 acres. Smaller areas may prove useful in special situations. Often these areas require skilled management

to maintain sustainability and preserve healthy biodiversity of plant life.

When utilized as a linear greenbelt and / or trail corridor, natural areas can serve as environmental bridges, supporting the movement of wildlife between other larger areas. When combined with public use areas, greenbelts are usually lined with maintained turf areas, and development can include open play areas, pedestrian and bicycle paths, park benches, picnic and rest areas, and water oriented facilities. It is quite common to see detention / retention basins included in these areas. In instances where this classification of park is flood prone, construction of permanent structures is discouraged. The public use infrastructure should remain supplementary to the functional classification of lands described.

The Community Park District does not have any Natural Resource areas in its care; however, the Cook County Forest Preserves are readily accessible within a short distance.

Park Classifications Summary

Classification Use	Service Area	Desirable Size	Desirable Site Characteristics	
Mini Park	Specialized Facilities that serve a concentrated or limited population or specific group such as tots or senior citizens	¼ mile radius	¼ to 1 acre	Within neighborhoods and in close proximity to apartment complexes, townhouse development or Senior Citizen housing.
Neighborhood Park/Playground	Areas for intense recreation activities Such as multipurpose athletic fields, court games, playground area skating, picnicking, etc.	¼ to ½ mile radius	1 – 7 acres	Suited for intense development. Easily accessible to neighborhood population; geographically centered with safe walking and bike access.
Community Park	Area suited for athletic complexes, large facilities and outdoor and indoor recreation areas, swimming pools	2-3 mile radius	7- 40 acres	May include natural features such as water bodies. Easily accessible for large group activities, may include concessions, restrooms and parking.
Sports Complex	Serving a single main purpose of athletic recreation / tournaments	2- 8 mile radius	16 – 75 acres	Specifically designed for athletic recreation. Includes concession stand, restrooms, and parking.
Special Use	Target use facilities i.e. skate parks, ice skate rinks, historical, cultural or social sites	½ mile – 1 mile radius	1 – 50 acres	Potential tourist attraction, destination site may include washrooms, concession, parking.
Natural Resource	Land designated for Preservation, interpretive Education, open space	8 – 20 mile radius	20 - 99 acres	Natural preserved areas may include wetlands, tourist attractions, destination point.