

executive summary

Good park systems throughout the world help to shape the urban landscape, improve the quality of life, increase property values, and make cities a better place to live, work, and play. Many places we consider great places to visit or live are so because of their appearance and their amenities. Parks not only enhance the appearance of our cities by offering green oases or protecting the natural beauty of a place, but also offer many recreational and cultural amenities for residents and visitors.

Parks play an important role in shaping our urban lands. For example, Boston's parks system features an extensive series of connected parks and green spaces known as the Emerald Necklace. This system was planned over a hundred years ago, and has influenced how the city has grown and aged. Chattanooga's park system has made an important contribution to that city's recent urban revitalization efforts. Chattanooga is now experiencing extensive reinvestment in its urban core. Minneapolis's quality of life is largely derived from its excellent parks system. Each of these cities' parks systems has made different contributions to their landscape and form.

Little Rock has the potential to utilize its system of parks in a similar manner. Situated in a natural setting at the convergence of four different physiographic regions of the state, Little Rock

enjoys a variety of natural landscapes, including rolling hills with wooded topography, a river valley carved by a scenic waterway, and lowlands as the Gulf coastal plains and the Mississippi Delta lands meet the Ouachita mountains. The city itself is still relatively contained within a manageable land area, although growth over the last two decades continue to push the city westward. Like many other cities, several of Little Rock's older neighborhoods are in need of revitalization and reinvestment. The population of Little Rock is stable, with relatively little growth within existing city boundaries. New population growth is largely credited to the continued expansion of the city's boundaries west.

Existing Park System

The existing park system is comprised of nearly 5800 acres of parks dotted around the city. Some key parcels, such as the River Market, Riverfront Park, Allsopp Park, Boyle Park, and Rebsamen Golf Course are embraced by citizens as successful examples of parks and facilities. While the city's parks are a valuable resource, some parks have suffered from years of inadequate attention. The message from community leaders and residents alike is one of reinvesting and committing to the maintenance of existing park parcels. In addition, both recognize that the city holds parcels that are ecologically significant but are underutilized for educational and recreational purposes.



Parks offer a place to relax.

Little Rock's 10 Largest Park Parcels

1. Fourche Bottoms *	1700 acres
2. Regional Park 2000*	617 acres
3. Rebsamen Golf	380 acres
4. River Mountain *	378 acres
5. Gillam Park	350 acres
6. Two Rivers	340 acres
7. Jack Stephens Youth Golf	250 acres
8. Boyle Park	243 acres
9. Hindman Golf	190 acres
10. Murray	166 acres

* undeveloped park parcel



Parks offer a place for organized play and active recreation...



...as well as passive recreation

The city has an even distribution of both neighborhood and community parks within its older neighborhoods, but new growth in west Little Rock has occurred in large part without park development coinciding. Many aging parks in these older areas are in need of updating and repair. In addition, some older facilities are undersized, outdated, and do not provide adequate recreational services for nearby residents. The recent purchase of 600+ acres west of the current city boundaries will accommodate some of the recreational needs of the residents of west Little Rock and provide a large open space tract in a quickly growing area of the city.

Existing parks lack a sense of citywide cohesion and connectivity, however. Citywide connectivity of recreational opportunities can enhance Little Rock as a unique place to live and visit. Drainage systems such as Fourche Creek, the Arkansas River, and smaller streams, provide excellent opportunities for connecting a number of parks. The connection of parks along the Arkansas River is already under way, and much of the land within the Fourche Creek flood plain is already in public ownership. By linking the city's existing recreational and cultural resources and providing infill and new parks where appropriate, the park system can play a major role in the quality of life of Little Rock.

Vision and Goals

Emerging from the visioning process was the desire to create a "city in a park". If realized, this vision can create Little Rock's identity to help it stand out among other communities throughout the nation. With the extensive natural resources present in the area, Little Rock can achieve this vision relatively easily with careful considerations to future growth and development. By rejuvenating older areas of the city with reinvestment and beautification, the natural beauty of the surrounding area can be brought back into the core of the city itself. Creating a city in a park, however, does not include the provision of land alone. Therefore, three major goals for creating a "city in a park" were established:

- CREATE A CITYWIDE SYSTEM OF PARKS, OPEN SPACES AND NATURAL AREAS that provides recreational, educational, ecological, and aesthetic benefits to enhance the livability of Little Rock.
- PROVIDE FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS TO SERVE ALL USER GROUPS, COMMUNITIES AND AGE GROUPS.
- ADVOCATE, BUILD AND MAINTAIN A CITY IN A PARK THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS, CREATIVE FINANCING AND EDUCATION.

Creating a City in a Park: The Design

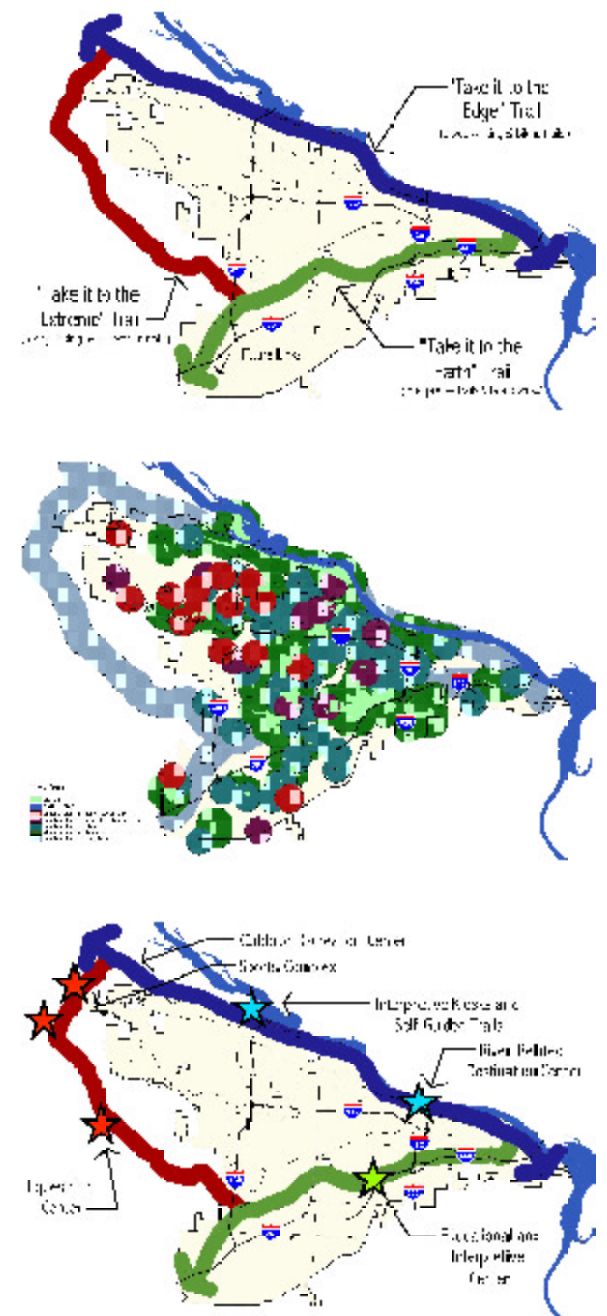
The creation of a citywide system of parks and facilities which serve all user groups must be addressed at a number of levels. Providing a framework for the development of a cohesive system while providing for needs in each distinct area of town can be accomplished with the following concepts.

The ***three-trail loop system*** sets the framework for a cohesive citywide park system. In combination with the complementary internal trail system and urban forestry program, this system links parks and facilities to create the “city in a park” atmosphere. Three major trail systems have been identified. The “Take it to the Edge” system includes an urban trail connection from east Little Rock and the William Jefferson Clinton Presidential Park along the Arkansas River through Riverfront Park, the River Market, Rebsamen Park, Murray Park, and Two Rivers Park and connecting to Pinnacle Mountain State Park. The “Take it to the Earth” system includes earthen trails and boardwalks through the Fourche Creek floodplain, one of the largest urban wetlands in the country. This system would connect to the Edge system in east Little Rock and connect to Gillam Park, Fourche Creek Park, Jack Stephens Youth Golf Academy, Hindman Park, and Otter Creek Park. The Earth trail would then connect to the third leg of the three-loop system, the “Take it to the

Extreme” system. This system traverses the hilly terrain west of Little Rock’s current city limits and connects to the recently acquired 617-acre Regional Park 2000 and back to the Edge system near Pinnacle Mountain State Park.

The ***eight-block strategy*** provides park services at the neighborhood level within the overall framework. By this concept, every resident will be within eight blocks of some type of public green space or public or private park. Park or green space areas should be provided to those residential areas which are not currently served within a eight-block radius.

The ***special facilities*** concept locates destination facilities along the three-trail loop system and integrates their services into the citywide plan. Such facilities include interpretive centers and trails at Two Rivers Park and Fourche Creek, including a larger educational center that addresses the wetlands ecology of Fourche Creek and unique geologic formations of Gillam Park. In addition, the integration of a river-related destination center is proposed, which includes the William Jefferson Clinton Presidential Park, Riverfront Park, Riverfest Amphitheatre, the River Market, and a proposed water-related center in east Little Rock. The collection would be linked by the “Take it to the Edge” system. An outdoor recreation center has been proposed along the “Take it to the Extreme” trail west of Little Rock’s city



Little Rock's Master Plan Standards

Park Land

Regional Parks	10 acres per 1000 people
Community Parks	5 acres per 1000 people
Neighborhood Parks	2 acres per 1000 people
Mini Parks	0 acres per 1000 people

Facilities

Community Centers	1 per 50,000 people
Fitness Centers	1 per 60,000-87,500 people
Swimming Pools	1 per 40,000-50,000 people
Baseball & Softball Fields	1 per 5,000 people
Soccer Fields	1 per 5,000-7,000 people
Football Fields	Provide as necessary
Tennis Courts	1 per 4,000 people
Basketball Courts	1 per 5,000 people
Playgrounds	1 in each active-use park
Community Gardens	Provide as necessary
Golf Courses	1 per 30,000 people

limits. A sports complex component is proposed at the Regional Park 2000 to alleviate demands for additional sports fields. Finally, an equestrian center is proposed along the "Take it to the Extreme" system.

Park Land and Facility Standards

Most park departments evaluate their park systems based on level of service (LOS) standards. Generally, comparisons are made between national LOS standards and those levels of service provided by peer communities. These standards act as a guide by reflecting quantities of park land and facilities needed to serve current and projected populations. Rather than structuring Little Rock's plan around a group of standards, the plan is reflective of a broad vision of what the system should be and concepts of how to get there. Levels of service were then compared to determine what specific park and facility types were needed within the broader system to serve the city's population adequately. A detailed account of existing facilities and programs, standards, and recommendations can be found in Chapter Five.

The Four Point Strategy

The four-point strategy was defined to articulate the goals of the plan and guide specific actions necessary to create a "city in a park" as they relate to the overall concepts. The strategies are as follows:

- 1. CREATE AN INTERCONNECTED MULTI-FUNCTIONAL OPEN SPACE SYSTEM:** Create an interconnected public open space system comprised of parks, greenways, riparian areas and floodplains, streets, sidewalks, and trails to link public and private facilities, provide an ecologically-responsible green infrastructure, and preserve the "City in a Park" character,
- 2. CONSTRUCT SIGNATURE PARKS AND FACILITIES:** Construct regional "banner" parks and facilities which provide new and expanded recreational opportunities to the citizens of Central Arkansas and add to the amenity package of living in Little Rock,
- 3. PROVIDE NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICE:** Provide a park or green space within an eight-block radius of each resident of Little Rock which accommodate recreational needs at the neighborhood level, and
- 4. CREATE A LIFETIME CUSTOMER:** Offer a diversity of recreational programs that serve each resident's interests from childhood to maturity.

Recommendations

An extensive list of policies and actions were developed to put in place a park system of the caliber and quality desired by Little Rock residents. The following are examples from the policy framework, located in Chapter Six:

- Upgrade five existing parks per year until all LRPR park properties are improved
- Create a citywide trail system and develop an urban forestry program through the three-trail loop framework
- Connect parks through linkages to the citywide trail system loop
- Provide green space within eight blocks of every resident through the implementation of the citywide trail system and/or new or expanded parks
- Consolidate and expand specific facilities to provide more effective services
- Provide recreational facilities which meet the needs of Little Rock residents
- Construct specialized facilities to reinforce the package of signature parks and facilities which are integrated within the three-trail loop framework
- Restructure programs to create lifetime customers by offering programs which involve citizens from early childhood through senior services
- Upgrade maintenance standards to create a "Class A" park system

- Develop a preventative maintenance schedule
- Develop a resource management plan for park properties
- Adopt an ordinance requiring all residential development projects to provide funds and/or land for procurement and development of public park property
- Reorganize LRPR in a way that positions the organization to effectively implement the master plan and increase citizen involvement in directing the plan
- Employ creative funding measures
- Develop revenue centers
- Establish and maintain a network of partnerships
- Advocate the implementation of a "City in a Park"

Cost and Phasing

An aggressive \$6 million annual budget for additional land, capital improvements, and operations and maintenance is proposed to accompany the organization's \$10.5 million annual operating budget which is currently in place. This increase in annual budget over 20 years allows the complete implementation of the master plan.

Improvements and recommendations of the master plan are phased over 20 years, with each phase occupying a 3 to 5 year period. Each phase consists of existing park and facility up-



Creating lifetime customers is an essential part of a successful parks system



grades, land acquisition, general improvements, new facilities, and implementation steps toward the completion of three trail systems that comprise framework for the city's overall park system.

Funding opportunities are available from a number of sources, including grants and funds such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund, TEA-21 funds, Community Development Block Grants, other federal and state grants. Parks foundations, general foundations, revenue bonds, and general obligation bonds are additional funding sources. Opportunities also include fees, such as real estate transfer fees, developer impact fees, reservation and permit fees, and user fees. Taxes such as local option tax revenues and hotel/motel taxes, as well as revenue from items such as naming rights, advertisement sales, merchandise sales, and concession and catering management sales are also funding opportunities. Land trusts, sponsorships, partnerships, and creation of authority for sports tournaments are also funding methods that can be utilized.