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# *Parks and Recreation Department 901 Texas St. Suite B, Denton, Texas 76209*

**REVIEW DATE:** As Needed (Last Review April 18, 2023)

**SUBJECT:** Parkland Acquisition Procedures

The City of Denton Parks and Recreation Department (PARD) has guidelines and procedures to help determine opportunities to expand park space. These procedures are driven by the following plans, objectives, and criteria.

**Resources to Guide Land Acquisition**

Parks and Recreation utilizes numerous documents to guide decision making. While these documents provide an overarching guidance and may not specifically outline a specific parcel for acquisition, they do direct staff with goals, objectives, and action items to steering land acquisition efforts.

* Denton City Council Strategic Plan
* Denton 2040 Plan
* Parks, Recreation, and Trails System Master Plan
* Urban Forest Master Plan
* Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan
* Denton Mobility Plan
* 10-minute Walk Campaign
* Clear Creek Master Plan
* Community Area Plans (Regional, Downtown, Park specific)

**Land Acquisition Criteria and Observations:**

The following list includes various criteria for determining the location and suitability of potential land acquisition:

* Council or citizen-driven requests
* 10-Minute Walk Map
* Preservation of open space and tree canopy
* Supporting underserved communities
* Connectivity to existing assets
* Cultural or historical significance
* Future surrounding development/proposed usage
* Potential to enhance economic development
* Current or future mobility development and connectivity
* Unique land features and topography
* Available parkland dedication balance in a specific zone or within a 1-mile radius.
* Environmental concerns and/or remediation required
* Supports future park assets as determined
* Adds to the beautification of Denton
* Staff awareness of the community and surroundings
* Identified in a city master plan

Based on the criteria findings, PARD staff will conduct on-site walkthroughs and engage with Real Estate, Development Services, Engineering, Utilities, Finance, and/or City Manager's Office to discuss the potential acquisition and identify funding mechanisms.

If deemed adequate for future parkland. PARD Staff will submit the official request to Real Estate to coordinate negotiations and appropriate paperwork to prepare for a future City Council Agenda list.

**Land Acquisition**

Ways in which land can be acquired.

The acquisition of land occurs in many ways through the general course of business. These processes are utilized to accomplish numerous initiatives set forth in the Parks, Recreation and Trails System Master Plan such as but not limited to, 10-Minute Walk, park acreage, trail development, playground offerings, and tree canopy.

1. **Develop Existing Parks**

The easiest way to improve the 10-Minute Walk score is to develop existing undeveloped park properties.

* Priority – Immediate impact to the 10-minute walk
  + Pecan Creek Linear Park
  + Villages of Carmel
  + Southwest Park
  + Hills of Denton
* Secondary (Future development but park design occurring)
  + Cole Ranch Park System
  + Hunter Ranch Park System

**2. Co-operative Agreements**

Denton Independent School District (DISD) and other educational providers.

The City of Denton Parks and Recreation Department will work directly with the Denton Independent School District and other potential partners to develop and execute cooperative agreements to allow the public access to other public or private parks and open space.

* Priority - Immediate impact to the 10-minute walk
  + DISD
    - Calhoun Middle School
    - LA Nelson Elementary School
    - Guyer High School
    - Hodge Elementary School
    - Denton High School (Old)
* Secondary
  + University of North Texas
    - Cooper Creek Trail West

**3. Partnerships -** These partnerships will be fostered to assist in the development of the community and expansion of the park system.

* Army Corps of Engineers
  + Various parcels being considered
    - Pecan Creek Trail
    - Hickory Creek Trail
    - Paddling Trails and access points
* Texas Parks and Wildlife Dept.
  + Greenbelt
  + Lake Ray Roberts
  + Paddling Trail with launch areas
  + Infrastructure improvements
* Texas Department of Transportation
  + Connectivity under and/or over state roadways
* Denton County
* Churches
* Non-Profit Agencies
* Railroads
* Various City Departments
* Hunter Ranch
* Cole Ranch

**4. Development Ordinance** – Parks and Recreation utilizes the park land dedication and development ordinance to assist in planning and building parks, trails and more with the assistance of local developments.

* Biddy Bye Park – Developer will construct park during infrastructure development
* Audra Property - In 2017, staff from PARD and DME met with the neighborhood regarding a potential park.  Property donated in 2021.
* Glenwood Meadows Park
* Country Club Terrace
* Eagle Creek Park
* Denton 195 Property
* Townsend Property
* Kings Row
* Deerwood Property
* Northpointe Trail
* Cyrene Development
* Legends Ranch

**5. Lease** - A lease should be negotiated with entities when possible that provides a long-term solution at a reduced cost of purchasing the land.

* Hartlee Field Property (Wastewater Property) - Administration from Utilities has provided the ability to use over 200 acres of the parcel for public use.  Some space is needed for a future pump station asset.
* Pecan Creek Property – Over 220 acres of land north and east of the Pecan Creek Treatment facility and landfill along Pecan Creek

**6. Easement** - An easement is an affordable option to PARD as it provides public access without the need to purchase land while still providing rights to the land holders.

* Denton County Property - An easement is needed to provide a concrete trail that will connect Carl Young Sr. Park to Woodrow Park as part of the Pecan Creek Trail.
* Utility easements in cooperation with Denton Municipal Electric, Sewer, Water and TMPA for trail development throughout the city.
* Cedar Street Park – Attained an easement to existing greenspace to serve as a public park space

**7. Conservation Easement** - A Conservation Easement is a designated land area, that which had an exercise of rights otherwise held by a landowner for conservation purposes. It is an interest in real property established by an agreement between a landowner and municipality. This form of land preservation provides the landowners a financial savings via state and federal taxes while still using the land for a purpose that is consistent with the partnering agency.  As with other real property interests, the granting of a conservation easement is recorded in the local land records and becomes a part of the chain of title for the property. The conservation easement could impact resale value as it is maintained with the current and any future property owners.

* Hunter Ranch Pilot Knob – A conservation easement was acquired in cooperation with Hunter Ranch in 2020
* Silver Dome property – This parcel would preserve a large cropping of Post Oak trees to be preserved in perpetuity

**8. Purchase** - Today with a prospering economy, land is raising in price and being utilized for residential and commercial development.  It is important that PARD identifies land opportunities today for future residents before land becomes too costly to purchase for parks and recreational facilities.

* Mills (acquired)
* Davidson property (acquired)
* South Denton property (under negotiations)
* Northeast Denton property (exploration)
* ETJ1 and ETJ2 - Begin to explore property in the ETJ1 and ETJ2 for future open space preservation.

**9. Donation** - Whenever feasible, it is preferred to development partnerships in which land can be donated to Parks & Recreation.  This will allow resources to be focused directly on park development and maintenance.

* Woodrow Park
* Rayzor Property near the Airport (acquired)
* Welch Property (pending TXDOT ROW acquisition)

**10. Connectability via City Planning and Development** - Trails will be planned, designed, and constructed at various times based on Capital improvement funding availability.  Some of these trails already have right-of-way while others will require more planning efforts. The thoroughfares provide a significantly easier way to connect parks proactively once land has been developed.

* Carroll Trail (Park and Transportation Development)
* Pecan Creek Trail (Partnership with City Departments and ACOE)
* Bonnie Brae Trail (City Capital Improvement)
* Mayhill Trail (City Capital Improvement)
* Hickory Creek Trail
* Hickory Creek Road Trail (City Capital Improvement)
* Cooper Creek Trail East (Environmental Services, City Capital Improvement, USACE)

Based on the criteria findings, PARD staff will conduct on-site walkthroughs and engage with Real Estate, Development Services, Engineering, Utilities, Finance, and/or City Manager's Office to discuss the potential acquisition and identify funding mechanisms.

A “Parkland Acquisition Evaluation Tool” was developed by staff to help in the decision-making process. This tool provides a mathematical analysis with scoring to help rank properties. While a high score may show its importance, this does not mean that it is the most critical parcel to acquire.

If deemed adequate for future parkland. PARD Staff will submit the official request to Real Estate to coordinate negotiations and appropriate paperwork to prepare for a future City Council Agenda list.

**Steps for Acquisition**

1. Identify potential property
2. Engage with Real Estate
3. Engage the property owner on willingness to sell
4. Identify funding with assistance with CMO and Finance
5. Brief City Council on potential acquisition
6. Attain an appraisal
7. Attain a survey
8. Attain a Phase 1 Environmental Assessment
9. Complete acquisition agreement

During the acquisition process, steps may vary due to negotiations, willingness to sell, funding and more.

**Method of Approving**

As part of the approval process, Parks and Recreation, along with supporting departments, will provide land under consideration to the Parks, Recreation and Beautification Board. Once the board supports the land acquisition, the initiative will be presented to City Council for purchase.

Periodically, Informal Staff Reports and a supporting PowerPoint presentation is submitted to the City Manager’s Office, Legal and City Council to provide an update on land acquisition. This occurs within a Legal Status Update submitted to City Council each Friday and is not a public document.

Land that is being purchased may not initially be presented to Park Board since it is considered a negotiated, non-public process.