

# PARKS & RECREATION 2024 MASTER PLAN

PUNTA GORDA'S PLACE TO PLAY



Punta Gorda

Florida's Harborside Hometown

**Reserved for Adoption Resolution**

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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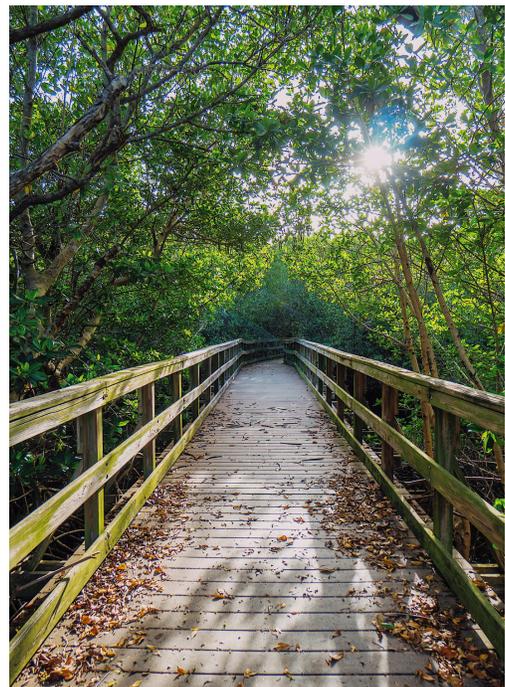
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Thank you to all who participated in the PRMP Naming Contest, attended Park Pop-Ins, completed the General Survey, and provided helpful comments throughout the plan development process. Special thanks to Punta Gorda resident and former Decatur, IL Parks & Recreation Communications Director, Lisa Gillen, for compiling materials, and editing and designing this plan. Thanks to former City Council members Bill Dryburgh, Lynne Mathews, and Donna Peterman for their oversight of the plan.



# I. INTRODUCTION



# INTRODUCTION

## The Importance of Parks & Recreation

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) is the leading not-for-profit organization in the United States dedicated to building strong, vibrant, and resilient communities through the power of parks and recreation. According to the NRPA, a public park is an area dedicated or designated by any federal, state, or local agency primarily for public recreational use.

Parks and recreation includes resources and services provided for the purpose of leisure, entertainment, and recreation. Natural areas like parks, nature preserves, trails, and community-built structures enable a variety of recreational activities, leagues, special events, arts programming, and environmental education. These activities may be passive or active and may be performed at will by the visitor or be organized by a public agency.

**According to the NRPA, parks and recreation promotes health and wellness, drives economic opportunity, unites people, and strengthens communities.**

**Parks and Recreation:**  
A TRUE HEALTH SOLUTION

Local park and recreation agencies provide health and wellness opportunities for all populations in communities across the country. As America continues to face serious health issues parks and recreation offer an affordable and accessible solution. Share with your communities the impact you are having on their health!

People who use parks and open spaces are **3 times more likely** to achieve the recommended levels of physical activity than nonusers<sup>1</sup>

Organized activities in parks in low-income neighborhoods can **increase park use by as much as 25%**<sup>2</sup>

Older adults engage in over **3.5 times more physical activity** in parks with walking loops.<sup>3</sup>

Children in summer camps at park and recreation sites report a **20% increase** in fruit and vegetable knowledge<sup>4</sup>

**73% of adults** believe parks, trails, and open space are an essential part of the healthcare system<sup>5</sup>

[www.nrpa.org/Health](http://www.nrpa.org/Health)

# INTRODUCTION

Parks are assets to the community, typically functioning as community meeting spaces, venues for the arts, environmental conservation areas, and/or economic drivers. Over the past decade, professional studies by governments, universities, and other agencies have illustrated the social, physical, environmental, and economic benefits of being within a ¼ - ½ mile radius of a park. Parks enhance the community's quality of life, foster development, stimulate private investment, and improve residents' overall health and well-being.

The National Recreation and Parks Association (NPRPA, [nrpa.org](http://nrpa.org)) also highlights the following benefits:

## Environmental Benefits of Parks

Parks contribute to air quality, reduce heat island effect, and serve as natural water filtration systems. In addition, well-connected parks and designated open spaces serve as wildlife corridors and promote contiguous natural habitats.

Clean waterways encourage people to fish, boat, and kayak, while environmental lands promote walking and bicycling. Connection to greenspaces and various recreational opportunities enhance quality of life, increase property values, and promote economic development.

## Physical Benefits

Parks and recreation facilities play a key role in improved physical health. Designated outdoor recreation spaces encourage physical activity and provide a connection to nature. The ability to gather, relax, and socialize builds strong families, friends, and an interconnected society.

## Social Benefits

Parks provide a community space for residents to come together, regardless of class, race, or physical ability. Research suggests that access to parks and recreation areas alleviates isolation in individuals, especially the elderly.

## Economic Impact

Communities with a well-developed park system gain numerous economic benefits, as parks are often the catalyst for tourism, a major component of Punta Gorda's economy. Parks and recreation services also often motivate business relocation and expansion. Purchases of equipment for leisure experiences increase local retail sales. Attendees at park events and festivals spend time and money on lodging, shopping and dining. Leisure activities reduce vandalism and crime.



# INTRODUCTION

## **Economic Benefit and Sustainability**

Measuring the economic value of parks can be challenging. While costs associated with acquiring, developing, and maintaining parks is relatively easy to calculate, the benefits received from a well-developed park system are harder to ascertain. As Punta Gorda's park system grows and develops, a more detailed picture of the economic benefits of parks would be useful for City Council to set priorities and goals and develop policies that will strike a balance between park development, park maintenance, and other City issues. Six (6) reasons that parks, recreation, open space, and land conservation make good economic sense appear below:

- Parks and open spaces often increase the value of nearby properties, along with property tax revenues.

- Natural areas attract businesses with trained employees in search of a higher quality of life.
- Parks attract tourists and boost recreational spending.
- Parks and recreation amenities also help reduce obesity and healthcare costs by supporting exercise and recreation.
- Working lands, such as farms and forests, usually contribute more money to a community than the cost of the services they require.
- Finally, conservation spaces help safeguard drinking water, clean the air, and prevent flooding.

State and local governments invest in parks and open spaces, not only to protect the environment and provide recreational opportunities, but because it makes good economic sense, attracting investment, rejuvenating cities, and boosting tourism.



# 2024 PRMP UPDATE

## **Punta Gorda Parks and Recreation**

With twenty-two parks and an extensive trail network, the City of Punta Gorda serves a community of over 20,000 residents. Public spaces for exercise, socialization, and play make our neighborhoods more healthful, dynamic, and attractive places to live, work, and visit.

## **Parks and Recreation Master Plan Update**

As part of its Comprehensive Plan, the City of Punta Gorda is required to complete a Parks & Recreation Master Plan (PRMP) update every ten (10) years. The first plan was completed in 2009, with a goal to provide a full range of recreational opportunities as the city grows; recommend modifications to recreational activity areas as needed; and organize, maintain, and upgrade park facilities.

In June 2020, the City of Punta Gorda began the process of updating the PRMP; however, the timing of the 2019 "Plan Punta Gorda" Citywide Master Plan, as well as unexpected shutdowns from the COVID-19 global pandemic, forced staff to develop creative new means of obtaining citizen input during this challenging time.

Turning to a social media strategy, staff launched a dedicated Parks and Recreation Master Plan webpage, provided weekly video updates, and sought community participation through a Project Naming Contest and an online survey. Weekly "Park Pop-Ins" were also hosted at several parks and in front of the City Administration building. More details from these data collection efforts are included in the Appendix.

Also included is a list of City projects completed since 2009 and a list of short-term and long-term capital improvement projects.

**The primary objective of the 2024 PRMP Update is to develop a framework for growth and improvement, as the City strives to meet the evolving needs of residents and visitors for enjoyable, sustainable parks.**

# PRMP PROCESS

## Public Outreach: Naming Contest

In June 2020, a Naming Contest helped kick off the Parks and Recreation Master Plan update for the City of Punta Gorda. The contest winner would receive a basket including a gift card and logo items from the Punta Gorda Police Department, the Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach Visitor & Convention Bureau, Punta Gorda Airport, and the City's Urban Design Division. Staff received 16 applications, and the final three were considered in an online vote that generated 228 responses. With 117 votes, the winner was Punta Gorda resident Pete Gaylord with "Punta Gorda's Place to Play."

## Public Outreach: Website

A dedicated page on the City's website, [www.CityofPuntaGordaFL.com](http://www.CityofPuntaGordaFL.com), detailed all activities associated with the Park and Recreation Master Plan update. Updates were added every 1-2 weeks.

## Public Outreach: Videos

Bi-weekly videos were uploaded to the City's website, YouTube, and Facebook pages. Topics included #1 Kick-off, Naming Contest, and Parks Survey; #2 Linear Park Fitness Zones (a fresh-air fitness amenity during Covid); #3 Public Input, including Park Pop-Ins, the opening of the PRMP General Survey, and the Naming Contest Winner; #4 Park Pop-Ins reminder; and #5 Progress over the month of July.

Fabiana Solano, Urban Design Planning Intern, presents a prize basket to naming contest winner Pete Gaylord at the July 8 City Council Meeting.



# PRMP PROCESS

## Public Outreach: Park Pop-Ins

Park Pop-Ins were held every Friday during the month of July in Gilchrist Park, Laishley Park, Ponce de Leon Park, Bailey Brothers' Park, and at the corner of Marion and Taylor. Staff received valuable feedback, likes, dislikes, and areas of improvement to the park system from roughly 100-120 park goers. In addition, a mini survey was offered for those who could not participate in-person at the Park Pop-Ins. The mini survey included the same six (6) questions asked at the Park Pop-Ins. The questions are listed below and the data was analyzed along with other surveys and public comments.

## PRMP Mini Survey

1. What park does this survey pertain to?
2. What do you like about this park?
3. What amenities would you like to see at this park?
4. How can this park become more accessible?
5. How can maintenance improve at this park?
6. How can this park be improved overall?

See all responses in the Appendix: Park Pop-Ins Community Input.

## PRMP Master Plan Survey

The 2024 Parks and Recreation Master Plan (PRMP) Update will be used to develop a comprehensive vision for Punta Gorda's park system and a framework for the long-term use and development of park facilities and programs. The City is committed to fostering community, inclusivity, and accessibility in safe and well-maintained parks and recreational facilities, and strengthening connections between places and people.

Further, the PRMP Update will shape the delivery of parks and recreation services and provide a foundation for the following:

- Building credibility and support from community members and stakeholders
- Informing citizens about each park's assets and needs
- Identifying capital improvement goals and associated costs
- Guiding critical decisions about parks and recreation facilities, infrastructure, programs, and services
- Developing recommendations and implementation strategies.

# PRMP PROCESS

## PRMP Master Plan Survey

The PRMP survey's 30 questions were separated into topic areas including General, Amenities, Maintenance, Demographic, and Open-Ended. The questions were designed to generate data on the public's use and general impressions of the current state of Punta Gorda's parks and amenities.

### Key survey information

- The 30-question survey was open for four months.
- The survey was distributed on multiple social media platforms, including Facebook, YouTube, and via email.
- Updates were shared on a weekly to bi-weekly basis.
- 354 individuals responded.

## SECTION 1: GENERAL

The first section of the survey asked 7 general questions, ranging from how often respondents visited the parks to whether parks and recreation should be expanded. Responses to these seven questions indicated that 99% of individuals had visited at least one of the city's parks, and 38% visited the parks weekly. Most respondents expressed that nothing prevented them from visiting parks, except COVID-19 (24.29%). COVID-19 limited public events and activities within the parks throughout most of 2020.

Respondents were also asked if any areas of the city lacked parks and recreation, and 45% believe that no areas were completely lacking in parks and recreation amenities.

Sixty-three percent said there is currently a sufficient number of parks, while respondents from Punta Gorda Isles (18%) and southern neighborhoods (14% - Burnt Store Meadows, Burnt Store Isles, and Seminole Lakes) desire additional parks and recreation amenities.

While the majority of survey respondents are content with the current size of the city's park system, 58% believe that *existing* park facilities should be improved and/or enhanced. Finally, 60% of respondents indicated an overall satisfaction with the park system.

## SECTION II: AMENITIES

This section included 8 questions regarding park amenities, rentals, and events, as well as individuals' feelings towards water-based, activity-based, and general site amenities. A majority of respondents felt most park amenities across the categories were meeting or exceeding their expectations.

# PRMP PROCESS

## SECTION II: AMENITIES (continued)

High points included waterfront access, walking paths, and lighting. On the other hand, a significant number of respondents felt that some amenities were below expectations, including kayak launches, bicycle paths, and parking areas.

Respondents were generally satisfied with waterfront access, fishing piers, and boat launches. Since Punta Gorda is a boating community, a specific question addressed boat launch (ramp) usage, with 60% of respondents indicating that they do not use these facilities. This may indicate that boat launches, while generally valuable to our community, are not vital to the average park user. Responses also indicated that the City should explore ways to provide more beach areas and paddle-craft launch areas.

Most respondents found activity-based amenities to meet or exceed their expectations, with bicycle/walking paths, playgrounds, tennis courts, and fitness equipment earning the highest positive responses. “Below Expectations” responses were in regard to bicycle paths, walking trails, and pickleball courts. Site-based amenities, like lighting and seating, generally met or exceeded expectations, with the exception of shade structures and parking areas. Shade structures and enhanced parking were also suggested in the open-ended comments section.

Regarding events and park facility rentals, over 80% of respondents indicated that they had never rented a park facility. This may be due to lack of need/interest or it may be because the general public is unaware that facility rentals are available. The majority of respondents indicated that the number of special events should be maintained or increased. These responses are a good indicator of the desirability of parks for special events.

## SECTION III: MAINTENANCE

The three maintenance-related survey questions were based on a rating of good (highest), fair, and poor (lowest), with the option to choose “N/A.” When respondents were asked how they would rate current park conditions, the majority gave it a rating of good. 70% of respondents rated maintenance good, and 75% rated cleanliness good. These responses reflect well on the hard work of Public Works staff and contractors.



# PRMP PROCESS

## SECTION IV: OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES

Five open-ended questions asked about suggestions, improvements, and maintenance issues. While questions were similar to those in previous sections, the open-ended format allowed respondents to elaborate further.

Some suggestions for possible additional parks included Burnt Store Isles, downtown, and on Aquí Esta.

One hundred fifty-two respondents suggested that parking should be improved at Ponce de Leon Park and at the Gilchrest Park pickleball courts.

Two hundred fifteen respondents indicated that they wanted more places to sit, more kayak launches, increased bike access, additional event spaces, and more water stations.

Most respondents rated maintenance “good” in Section III, but in the Open-Ended Section IV, 44% of individuals offered some form of maintenance improvements, such as adding more flowers, trimming dead branches, emptying dumpsters more often, and more personnel. These comments appear to indicate a desire for a higher level of park maintenance.

## SECTION V: DEMOGRAPHICS

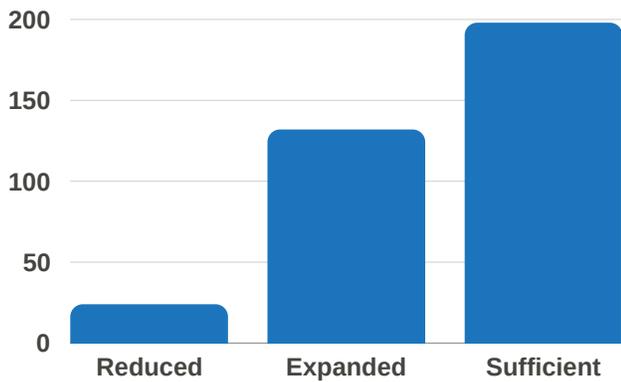
To end the survey, seven demographic questions were included. Seventy-two percent of respondents were in the 55-74 age group. As can be expected with this age demographic, over 90% do not have children under the age of 18 in the home; however, 35% of those aged 55-74 said that grandchildren/children under the age of 18 frequently visit.

Over 90% indicated they own their home, and the majority are full-time residents. Finally, 52% of respondents stated that they live in Punta Gorda Isles.

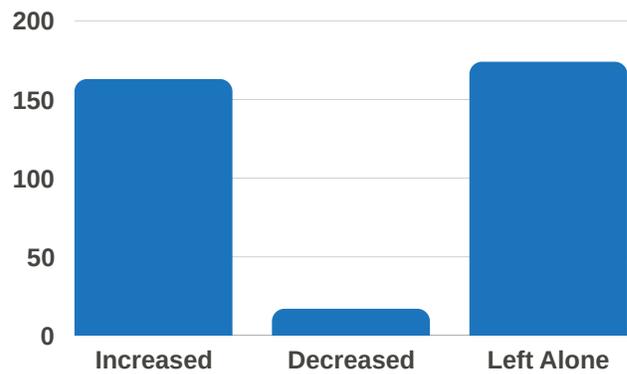
## CONCLUSION

Sixty percent of survey respondents indicated an overall satisfaction with Punta Gorda parks. Desired improvements include expanded parking, shade structures, bike access, water stations, kayak launches, and attention to maintenance. Future surveys will attempt to attract a more balanced distribution of responses from the entire Punta Gorda community, which may reveal a growing need for additional park amenities in western and southern neighborhoods.

# PRMP PROCESS

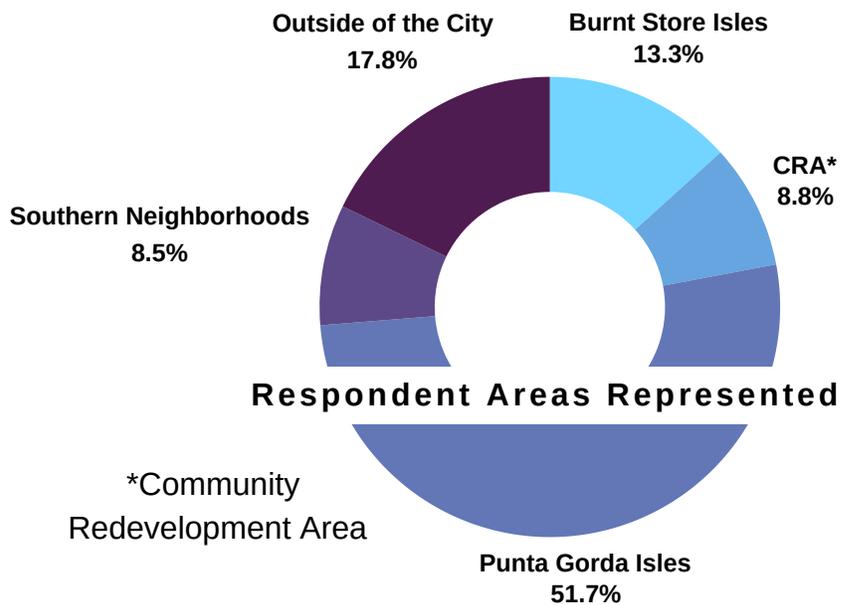


Should Special Events be expanded?

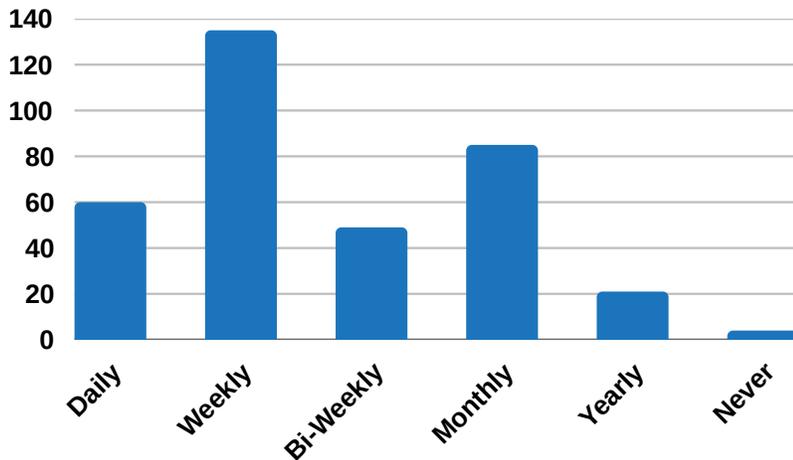


Funding for City Park Facilities/Amenities

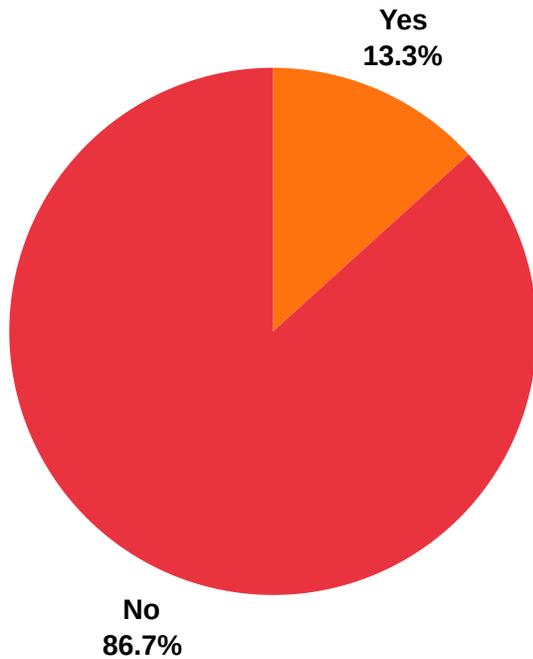
Over 50% of survey respondents live in Punta Gorda Isles. 69% have resided in Punta Gorda for at least 12 months. 72% are aged 55 - 74.



Frequency of Respondent Park Visits



# PRMP PROCESS



Have you ever rented a City park?

**67%**

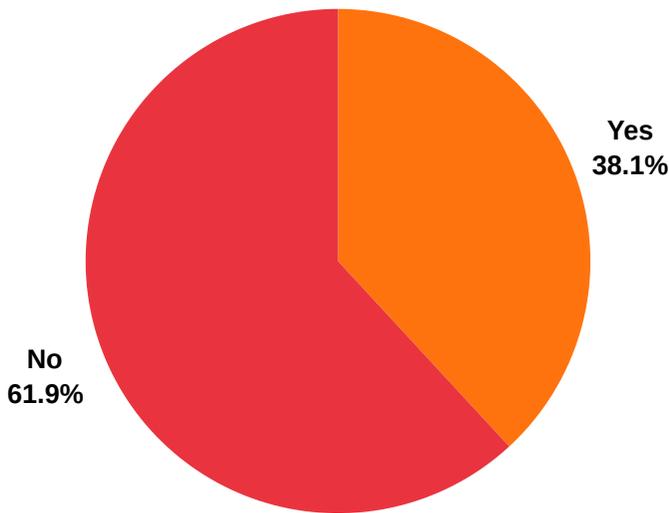
**RESPONDENTS**

Feel that current park conditions are good (highest rating).

**70%**

**RESPONDENTS**

Gave current park maintenance a rating of good (highest ranking).



Do you use the City's boat ramp facilities?

**77%**

**RESPONDENTS**

Find the parks to be very clean.

**99%**

**RESPONDENTS**

Have visited at least one of the City's parks.

## COVID-19

Was the main reason respondents did not use the park system.

# PRMP PLAN USE

The PRMP Update will clarify the use, priorities, and guidelines for Punta Gorda's parks and recreation facilities for the following groups and individuals:

VALUE OF PRMP UPDATE TO PARK PARTNERS	
<b>Community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand knowledge of all parks and facilities, not just the three community parks (Lashley, Gilchrist, and Ponce de Leon)</li> <li>• Appreciate park benefits and services</li> <li>• Understand City decisions</li> </ul>
<b>City Council</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct priorities for parks and recreation services</li> <li>• Guide planning for expected growth, land use, and public services</li> <li>• Understand public issues and desires</li> <li>• Identify funding gaps</li> </ul>
<b>Citizen Advisory Board</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide policy framework for business/priorities of Citizen Advisory Committee</li> <li>• Establish baseline to measure success</li> <li>• Promote parks and recreation</li> <li>• Advocate for priorities identified in public surveys</li> </ul>
<b>City Staff</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guide daily decisions based on adopted policy</li> <li>• Plan workload and resource needs</li> <li>• Identify ways to fill gaps</li> <li>• Utilize current park facility inventory</li> <li>• Establish baseline to measure success</li> <li>• Promote benefits of parks and recreation</li> </ul>
<b>Developers and City Partners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand park development process</li> <li>• Follow development standards for facilities</li> <li>• Follow guidelines for project/community designs</li> <li>• Fulfill identified gaps in facilities or programs</li> <li>• Adhere to policy framework for partnerships</li> <li>• Avoid duplication of services</li> </ul>

# EXISTING PLANS

The Parks and Recreation Master Plan process could not happen on its own. Through implementation of a Comprehensive Plan, Land Development Regulations, and other documents, the City of Punta Gorda promotes a coherent and cohesive built environment that respects local, historical, and regional architecture, an integrated and balanced transportation system, adequate provision of utility infrastructure, schools, parks, and other public necessities, as well as the preservation of the natural environment. In determining future facility needs, the City will implement sound urban growth management strategies to connect the built environment with our natural surroundings, for the physiological, sociological, and recreational enjoyment of our residents and visitors. Following is a list of documents that have helped shape and guide our park system.

## City of Punta Gorda Comprehensive Plan

Completed in 2023 (Resolution 2013-2024), the City of Punta Gorda's 2045 Comprehensive Plan provides a community-wide vision for growth and development. It contains thirteen (13) elements, nine (9) of which have a direct bearing on the Parks and Recreation Master Plan (PRMP).

1. Future Land Use Element
2. Conservation Element
3. Coastal Management Element
4. Recreation and Open Space Element
5. Community Facilities Element
6. Transportation Element
7. Public Schools Facilities Element
8. Capital Improvement Element
9. Historic Element



# EXISTING PLANS

## 2009 Parks and Recreation Master Plan

Adopted in 2009 (Resolution 2848-09), the Parks and Recreation Master Plan includes the following:

- Inventory of existing and proposed park sites;
- Designation of each site as a passive or active park;
- Desired use of each park (i.e., for festivals, markets, relaxation, sports, activities, etc.) with necessary amenities for that use;
- Analysis of level of service (LOS) to residents.

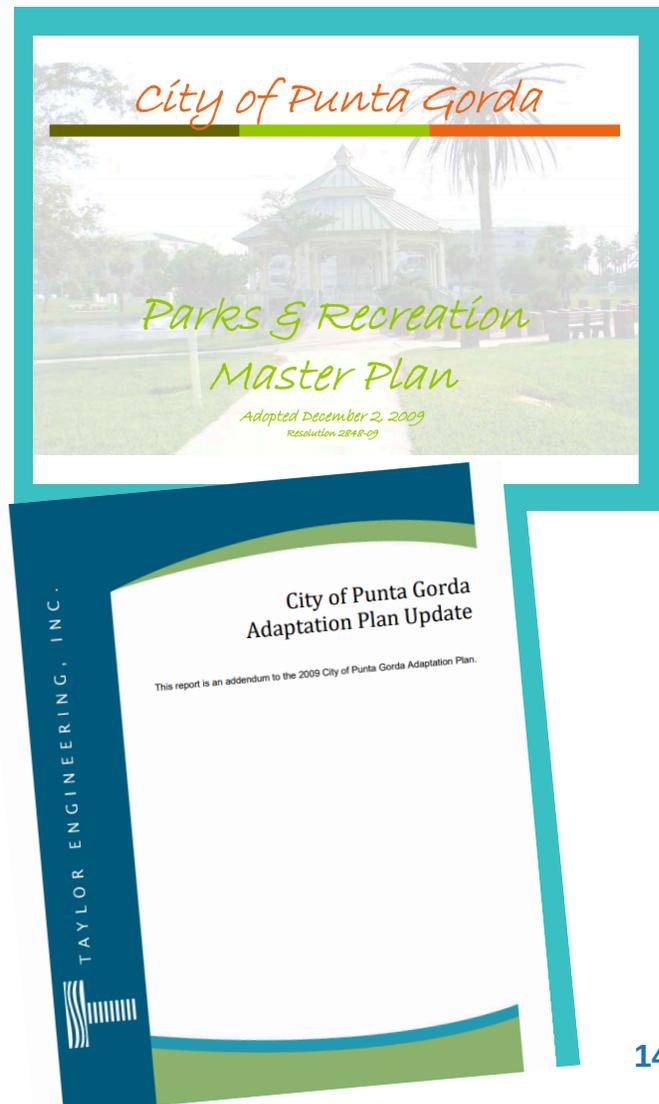
The benefits identified in the 2009 PRMP help promote the City's sense of place by providing a strong foundation on which the parks and recreation system can continue to grow and develop.

## Complete Streets Resolution

In 2013, the City adopted a Complete Streets Resolution (Resolution 3047-13) to ensure the safety of all roadway users. This policy guides the planning, engineering design, and construction of transportation and infrastructure-related capital improvement projects.

## Climate Adaptation Plan

Accepted by the City Council, the 2019 update of the City of Punta Gorda's 2009 Climate Adaptation Plan is a continuation of planning efforts to protect residential, commercial, and economic resources from the effects of sea level rise and other climate-related issues. The State, County, and City-owned environmental preservation areas provide some degree of protection from these forces. As the full impacts of sea level rise become evident, modifications within the City's waterfront parks could provide an enhanced buffer.



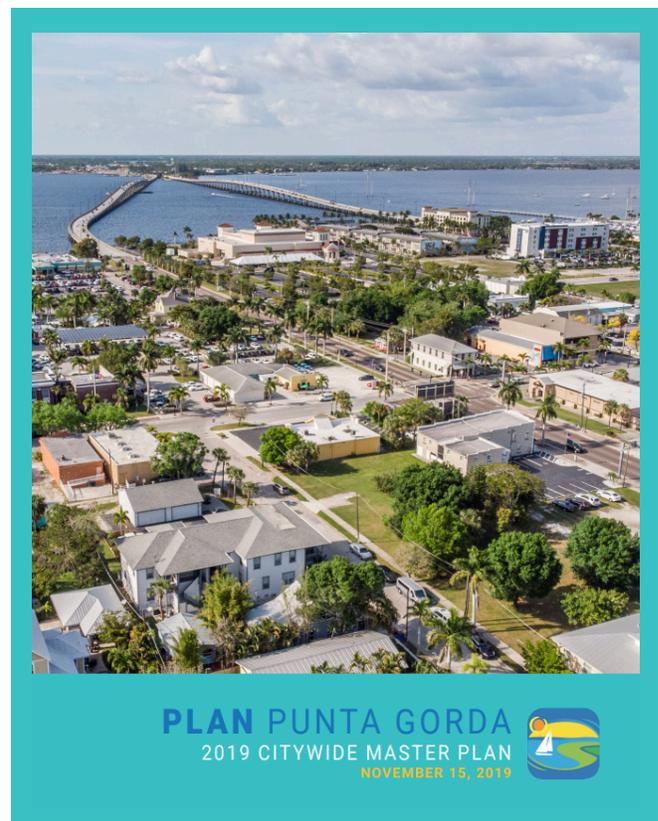
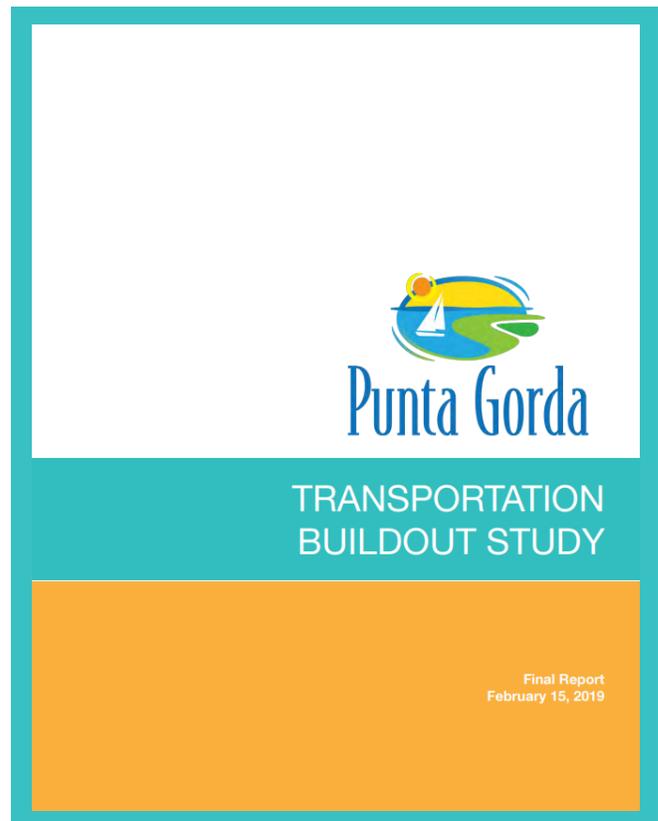
# EXISTING PLANS

## Transportation Buildout Study

Updated in 2019 (Resolution 3411-19), the Transportation Buildout Study was developed to identify Punta Gorda's existing and future transportation needs and to guide long-term transportation planning efforts. The report benefits from information and guidance from both technical analysis and input from key community stakeholders. The technical analysis includes long-term population and employment forecasts for the City and surrounding planning area, identification of existing transportation issues, and a forecast of future transportation conditions. Stakeholder perspectives continue to be important when considering the location and intensity of future community growth and their impacts upon transportation.

## Plan Punta Gorda 2019 Citywide Master Plan

Accepted by City Council on November 15, 2019, the Plan Punta Gorda 2019 Citywide Master Plan is the first phase of a 3-phase project that will include updates to the Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Regulations. Punta Gorda's footprint has evolved over the years, and businesses have shifted from industrial and commercial in focus to service and tourism. The purpose of the plan is to formulate a comprehensive set of recommendations that balance community goals with the desire for a vibrant and economically sustainable future.



## II. PARK CLASSIFICATIONS



# PARK CLASSIFICATIONS

Punta Gorda's parks and open spaces are distributed throughout the City, from "pocket parks" and neighborhood parks to expansive community parks and environmental preservation lands. The City owns, operates, and maintains the majority of park and recreation sites, as well as urban plazas, open spaces, and greenbelts that serve as visual amenities.

Bicycle/walking paths and special purpose parks like the Harbor Walk, Linear Park, and multi-use recreational trails are also maintained and operated by the City. The History Park and Cooper Street Recreational Center are operated by other entities.

## Park Types

The City's parks system is comprised of six distinct park types - **Regional, Environmental, Urban, Waterfront, Linear, and Neighborhood**. While each type is unique in terms of how they operate within the larger system, consistent design features, materials, configurations, landscaping, and methods of construction readily distinguish our parks as unique, yet connected to the whole.

## Level of Service (LOS)

Level of Service is established to form a baseline by which we measure the evolution of our community and our parks system over time.

LOS describes the amount and quality of park and recreation facilities needed to serve the community at a measurable standard. Historically, LOS has been measured by dividing the total acreage of the parks system by the population served. However, this area-to-population measure cannot take into account the accessibility of the parks to the population served.

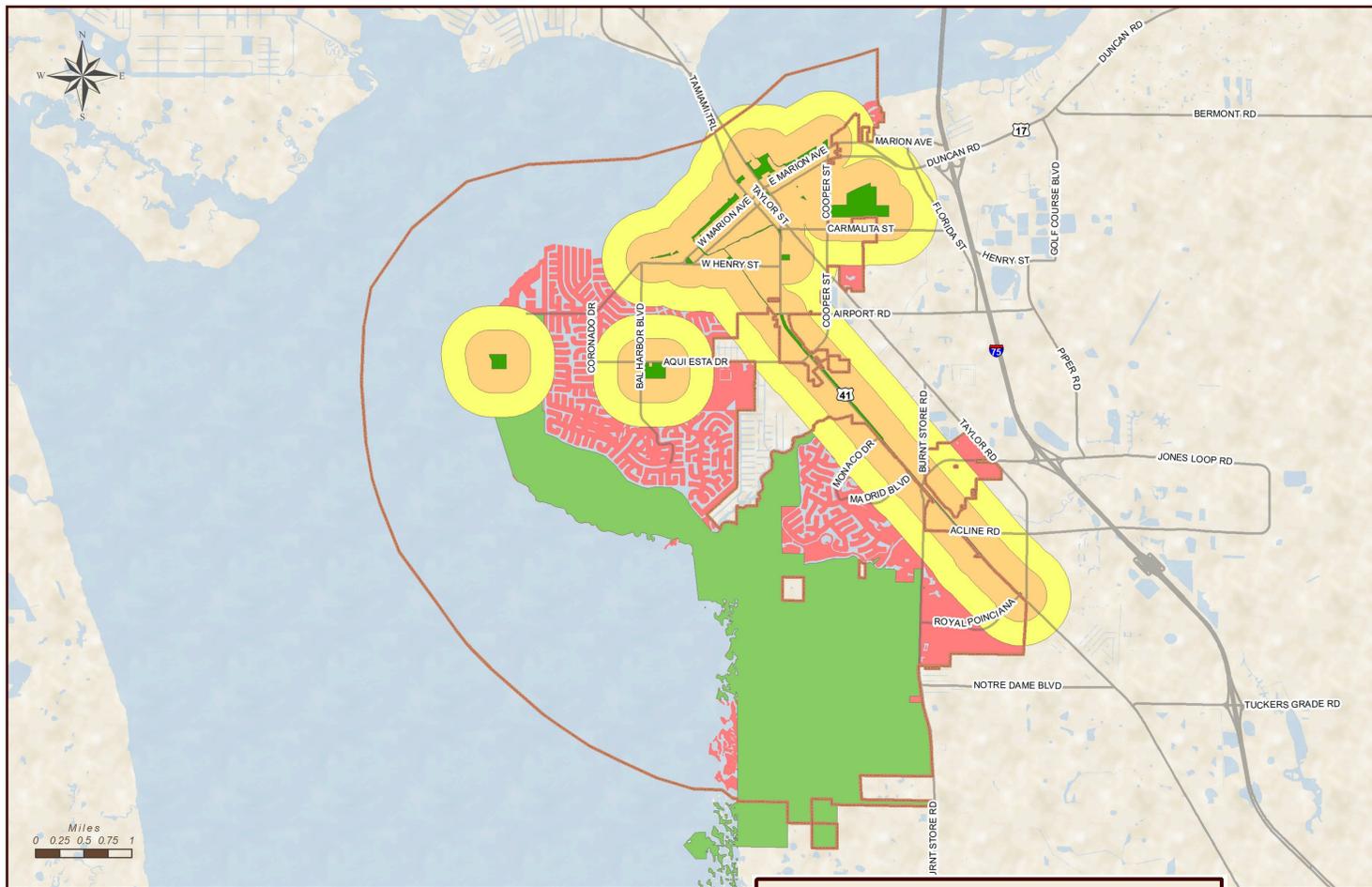
Park lands are crucial to people's physical and mental well-being. The Trust for Public Land (TPL) has tracked green space availability across U.S. metros, using a "ParkScore Index," which measures how well cities are meeting residents' needs for parks, with scores based on park access, acreage, investment, amenities, and equity. TPL asserts that all Americans should be able to access a park within a 10-minute walk from their home.

This updated process of mapping population proximity to park system facilities helps the City of Punta Gorda to:

- Identify areas that are outside of a 10-minute walk to an existing park and how many people live in that area;
- Identify geographically isolated areas where sidewalks or pathway extensions may connect individuals with park system facilities;
- Over time, determine whether our growing population continues to reside within or outside of a 10-minute walk to a parks system facility.

# PARK CLASSIFICATIONS

## 2021 City of Punta Gorda Park Level of Service (LOS) Map



This map illustrates the level of service (LOS) for Punta Gorda's Parks System. The LOS standard is based on a proximity measurement of a typical 5 to 10 minute walk. While LOS mapping provides a foundational metric to determine whether our parks system is meeting residents' needs, LOS alone cannot illustrate the full scope and range of need. We must also consider community input, park quality, community profile and demographics, regional/national park trends, accessibility, and acres of park ground per resident.



# REGIONAL PARKS

Regional parks are multi-use parks intended to serve large populations. These parks are primarily "drive-to" facilities providing active and passive recreation opportunities, as well as organized events for all age groups. While these parks may include passive and nature-based activities, they are primarily geared towards organized sports and other recreational uses. National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) standards for regional parks cover a wide variety of potential uses, features, and park sizes to account for the endless array of community needs and site-specific characteristics.

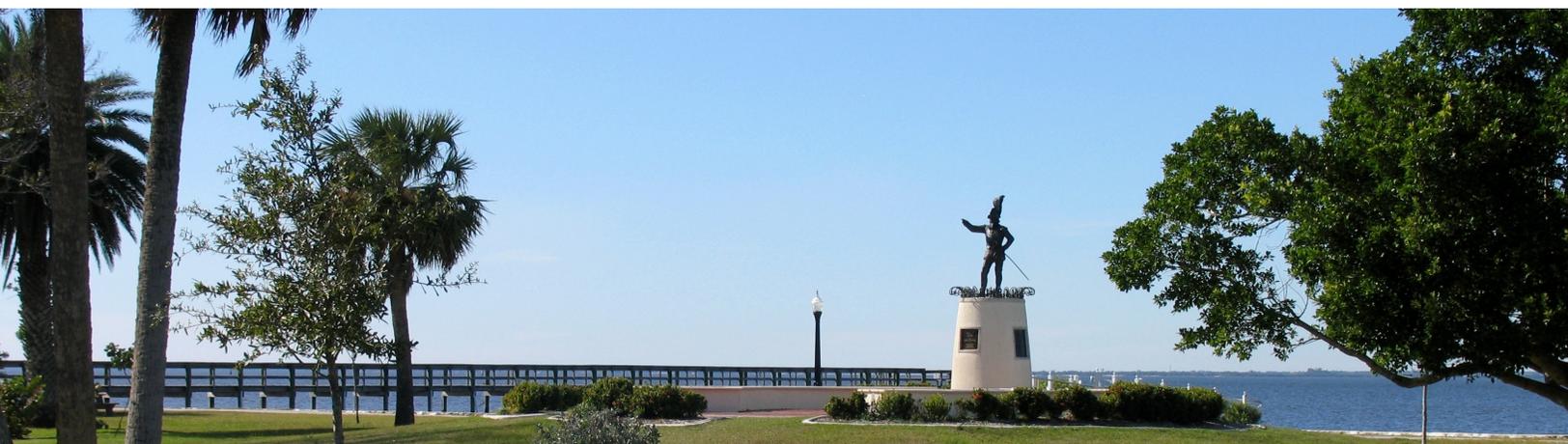
While regional parks can enhance the quality of life of neighborhoods within walking distance, their status as a regional attraction can lead to design considerations and use patterns which can diminish the quality of life in neighborhoods within walking distance. Parking lots, automobile traffic, noise, and light encroachment can all negatively impact adjacent neighborhoods.

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 access to athletic fields, a skate park, BMX track, recreation center, and public pool facilities. Gilchrist, Laishley, and Ponce de Leon are regionally attractive parks, though they are quite small in size, relative to the typical regional park.

Since regional parks are specifically scaled and designed to service regional recreational needs, the service area for these parks is not based on a 5 to 10 minute walk radius. Since these parks are primarily "drive-to" parks, the primary level of service (LOS) area is 5 - 10 miles.

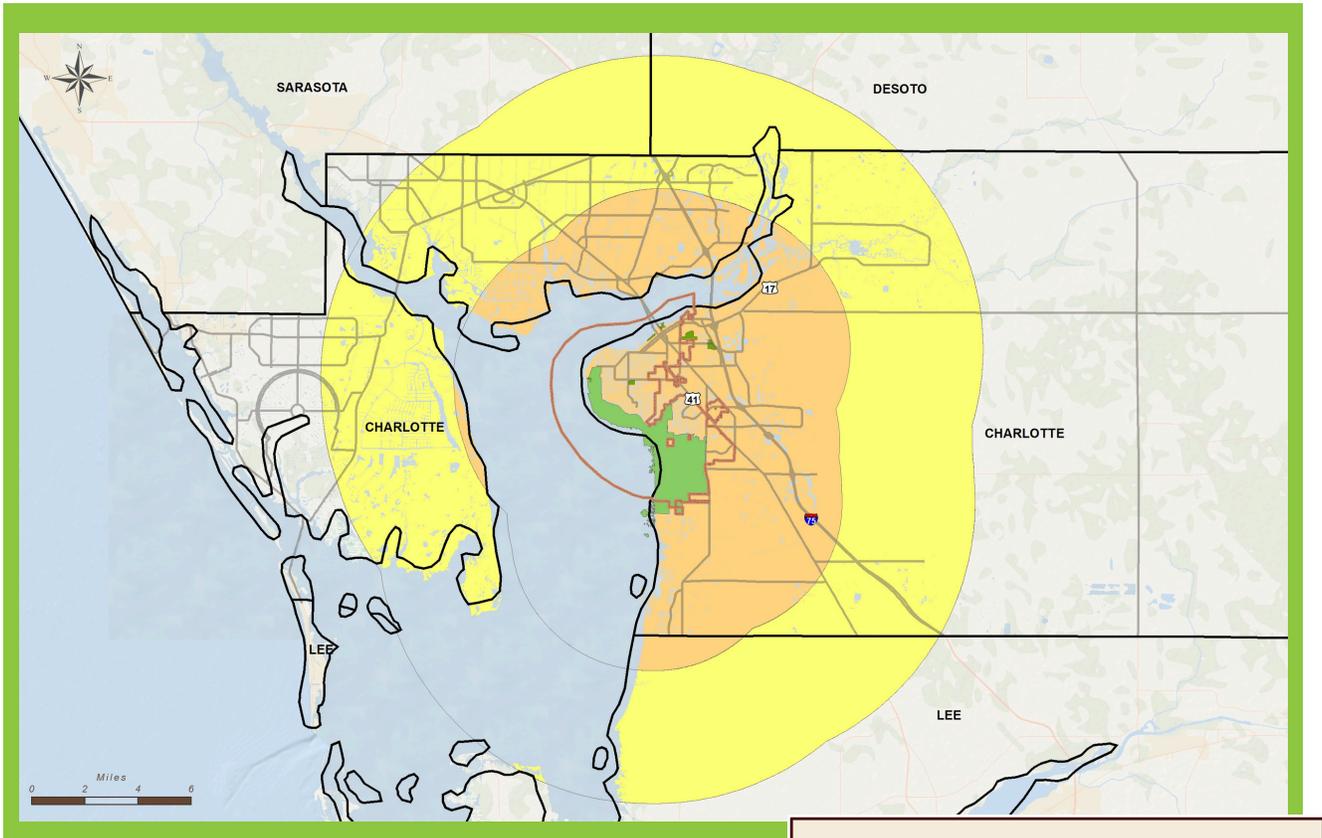
Level of Service shall be:

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

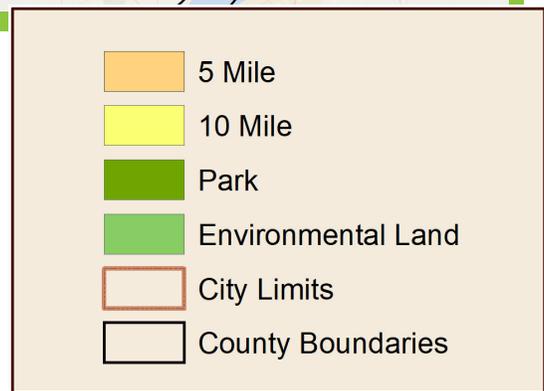


# REGIONAL PARKS

## 2021 City of Punta Gorda Park LOS Map for Regional Parks



This map illustrates the level of service (LOS) areas for Regional Parks which serve the city of Punta Gorda. The LOS standard for Regional Parks is based on a proximity measurement related to typical distances that can be covered by a 10 to 20 minute drive (5 - 10 miles). This drivable proximity distance is used for Regional Parks, since they are primarily designed to serve large-scale organized and active recreational needs.



# ENVIRONMENTAL PARKS

Environmental Parks are established to protect an area of significant environmental value. Punta Gorda is fortunate to benefit from an extensive, ecologically rich environmental park system, which covers over 45% of the city's total land area. The primary steward is the State of Florida through the Charlotte Harbor Buffer Preserve (the Preserve), which provides a strong foundation for our community's understanding and appreciation for our natural environment. Preserved lands protect the natural beauty and healthy ecological function of the Charlotte Harbor estuary, thereby enhancing the local economy through commercial fishing, boating, and other resource-based recreational activities.

The City of Punta Gorda manages and maintains the Nature Park and Ponce de Leon Park, both environmentally sensitive areas. The City also benefits from the Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center (CHEC) on Alligator Creek. CHEC ([checflorida.org](http://checflorida.org)) is a private, non-profit 501 (C) 3 corporation, providing environmental education, recreation, research, and conservation land management services.

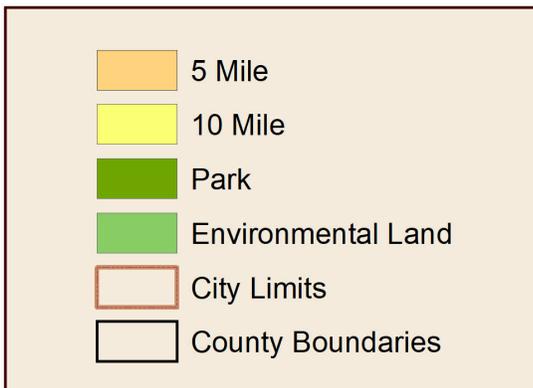
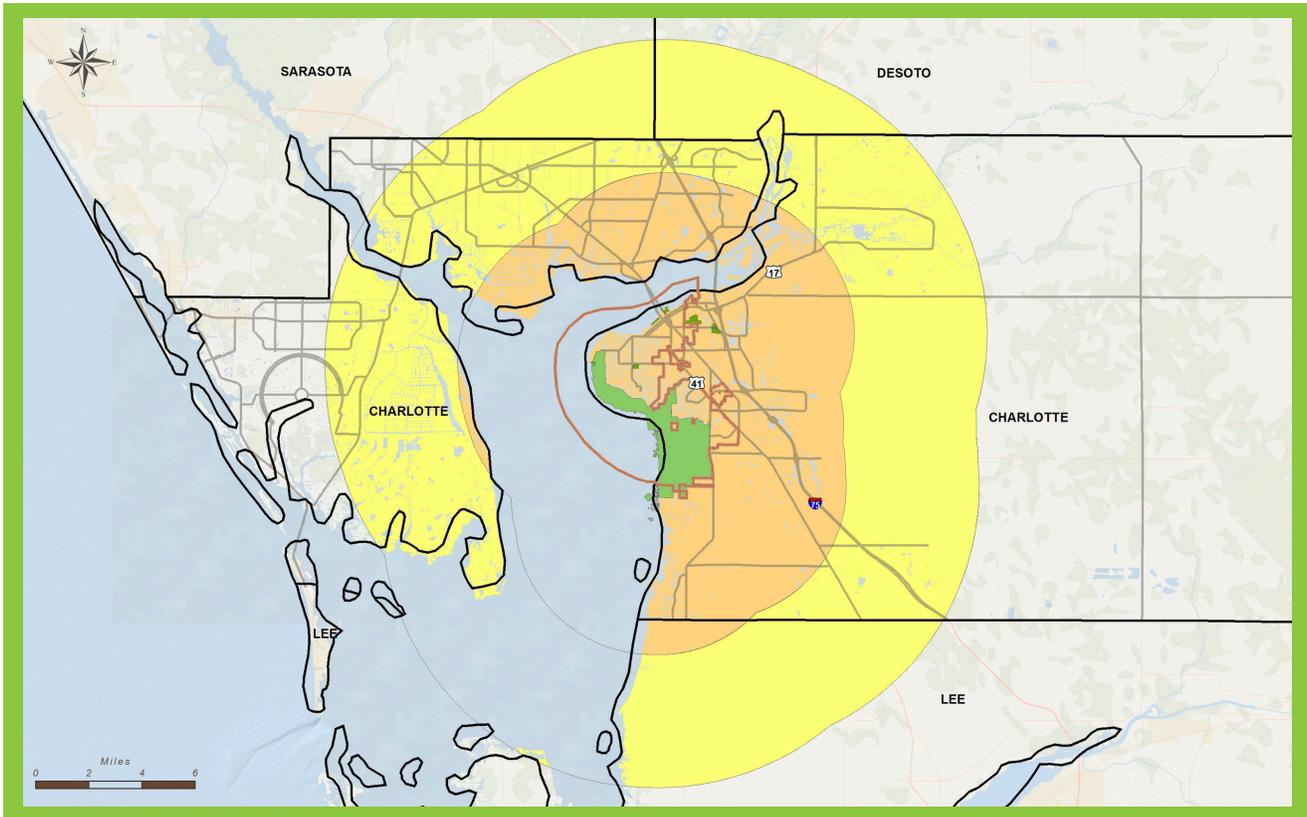
Level of Service shall be:

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



# ENVIRONMENTAL PARKS

## 2021 City of Punta Gorda Park LOS Map for Environmental Parks



This map illustrates the level of service (LOS) areas for Environmental Parks which serve the City of Punta Gorda. The LOS standard for Environmental Parks is based on a proximity measurement related to typical distances that can be covered by a 10 to 20 minute drive. Drivable proximity distance is used because Environmental Parks are designed to serve large-scale ecological preservation and resource-based recreational needs beyond the scale of a small community or neighborhood.

# NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS

Neighborhood Parks serve a variety of age groups within a limited residential area. They include active recreation amenities such as playgrounds and court games, as well as passive recreation amenities like trails, tables, and benches for walking, viewing, sitting, and picnicking.

Many of Punta Gorda's parks are considered neighborhood parks. Design elements may include walkways, pavilions, community gardens, playgrounds, or fitness stations. Plazas or small open green spaces provide neighborhood event spaces. These areas may be landscaped with native trees and plants for shade and sustainability. If seating is provided, it may include benches, seat-walls, or fixed seating with tables.

Special neighborhood park elements may include water features for sound and beauty, play surfaces for tots or older children, educational signage, small scale parking, and pedestrian-scale lighting for safety.

All of Punta Gorda's parks serve, to one extent or another, the function of a neighborhood park, due to their location adjacent to residential neighborhoods. Even regional parks like Gilchrist, Laishley, and Ponce de Leon fulfill neighborhood park functions for nearby residents.

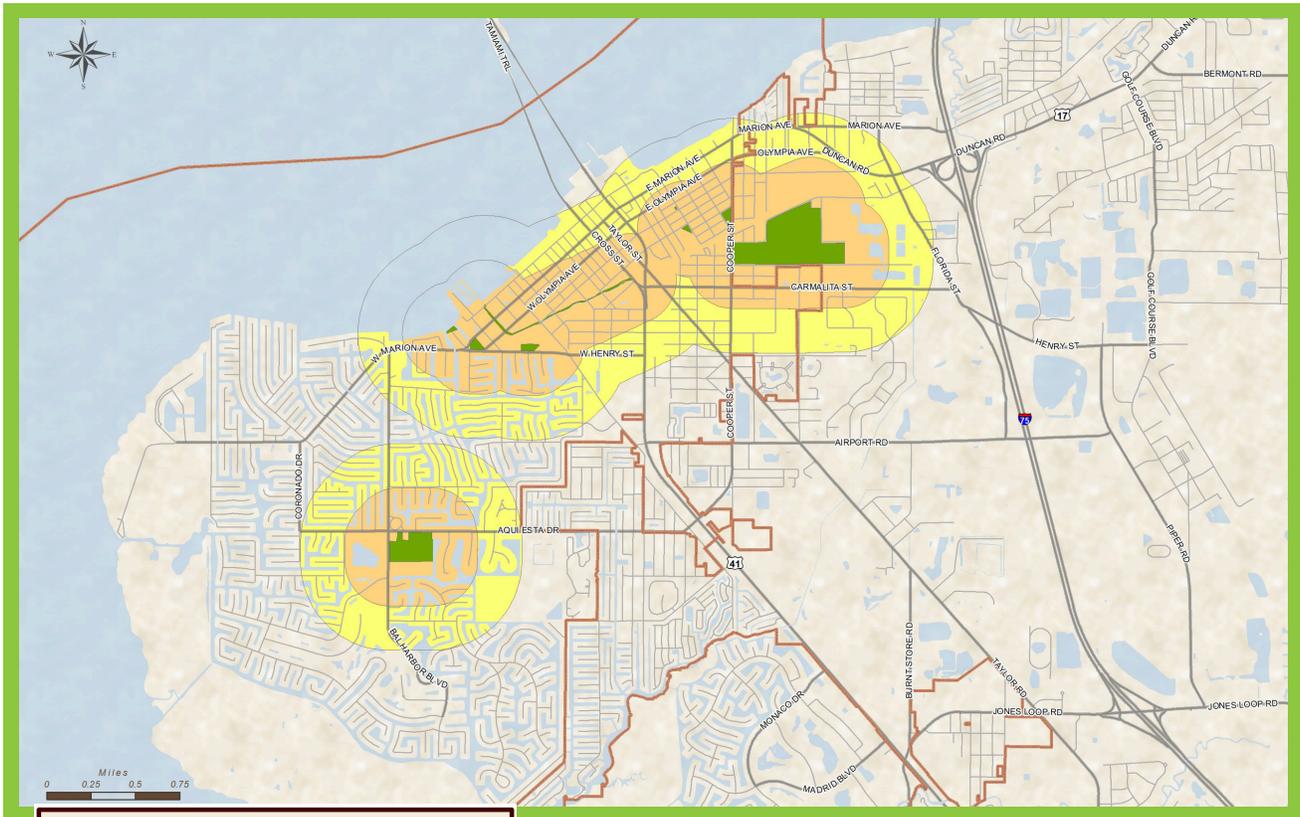
Level of Service shall be:

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



# NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS

## 2021 City of Punta Gorda Park LOS for Neighborhood Parks



This map illustrates the level of service (LOS) for Neighborhood Parks in Punta Gorda. The LOS standard is based upon a proximity measurement related to typical distances that can be covered by a 5 to 10 minute walk. Walkable proximity distance is used, as these parks are primarily designed to serve the needs of adjacent residents. Note: no Neighborhood Parks exist in areas of the city not included on the map.

# URBAN PARKS

Urban parks are the cornerstone of a community's built environment that provide green relief and public gathering spaces. Urban park features may include walkways, activity areas, native trees, benches, tables, fountains, signage, small scale parking, and pedestrian scale lighting.

Herald Court Plaza, Bailey Brothers' Park, and Pittman Park Extension all serve as urban parks, due to their location within/adjacent to residential and commercial properties.

Level of Service shall be:

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





# WATERFRONT PARKS

Waterfront Parks are designed to maximize individuals' visual and physical connection to the water. Enhancement features include native and drought-tolerant landscaping, wayfinding and interpretive signage, a variety of parking options (including accommodations for large-scale events), and decorative lighting. Our waterfront parks, Gilchrist, Laishley, and Ponce de Leon, serve both local and regional users, with visitors from Charlotte, DeSoto,

Sarasota, and Lee Counties enjoying numerous events and activities, thereby benefiting our local economy.

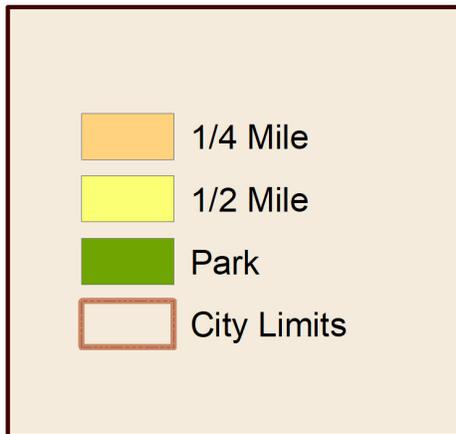
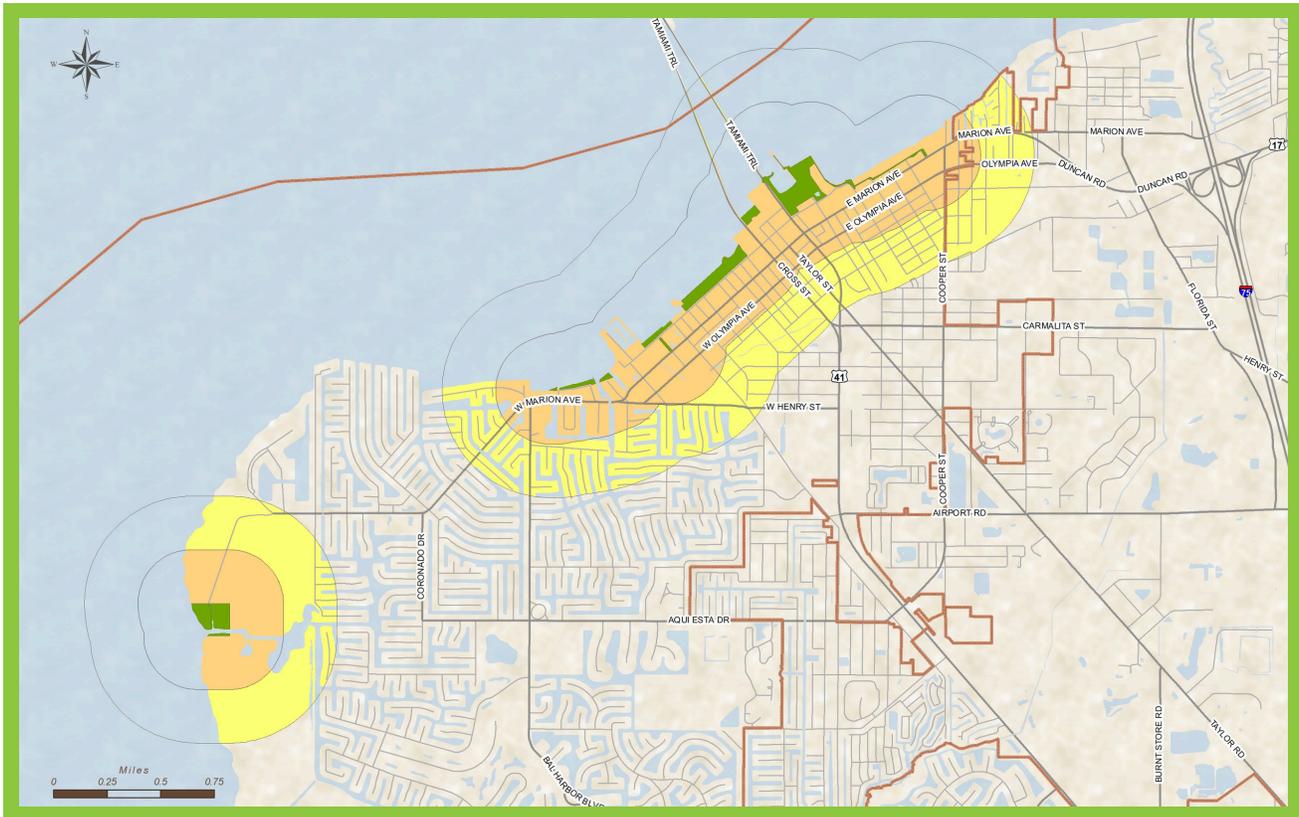
Level of Service shall be:

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



# WATERFRONT PARKS

## 2021 City of Punta Gorda Park LOS Map for Waterfront Parks



This map illustrates the level of service (LOS) areas for Waterfront Parks. The LOS standard is based on a proximity measurement related to typical distances that can be covered by a 5 to 10 minute walk. Though Waterfront Parks are primarily designed as regional attractions, the parks most directly benefit properties within a reasonable walking distance. Note: no Waterfront Parks exist in areas of the city not shown on the map.

# LINEAR PARKS

Linear Parks and Pathways are built connections or natural corridors that link parks together. Typically, linear parks are developed for one or more modes of recreational travel such as walking, jogging, biking, in-line skating, hiking, canoeing, and may include active play areas. The NRPA does not stipulate specific standards for linear parks, other than they should be sufficient to protect the resource and provide maximum usage. Three (3) types of linear parks include the following:

- **Greenways:** Linear open spaces established along either a natural corridor or a man-made right-of-way for walking or bicycling. Greenways provide recreation, transportation, fitness, and economic benefits. The Punta Gorda Pathways system of greenways links the existing park system by way of the Harbor Walk, Multi-Use Recreational Trails, and linear connections.
- **Blueways:** Water paths developed with launch points and points of interest for canoeists and kayakers, providing low-environmental-impact recreational opportunities, as well as environmental awareness.
- **Avenues:** A complete street with landscaping, bicycle/pedestrian, and motor vehicle facilities. Punta Gorda Harbor Walk, Linear Park, and US 41 Multi-Use Recreational Trail (MURT) serve as linear parks.

The Harbor Walk is situated along Charlotte Harbor and extends approximately three (3) miles. The City's Linear Park transformed a historic railroad right-of-way (once the southern terminus of railroad service on Florida's western coast), into a scenic trail. The Linear Park includes the "Fitness Zone," located between W. Retta Esplanade and W. Olympia Avenue. Three (3) outdoor gym areas contain fitness equipment safe for use by persons aged 14 and older, regardless of ability. Lastly, at approximately four (4) miles in length, the MURT provides individuals an opportunity to walk or bicycle to neighborhoods and commercial areas south of Punta Gorda's historic core.

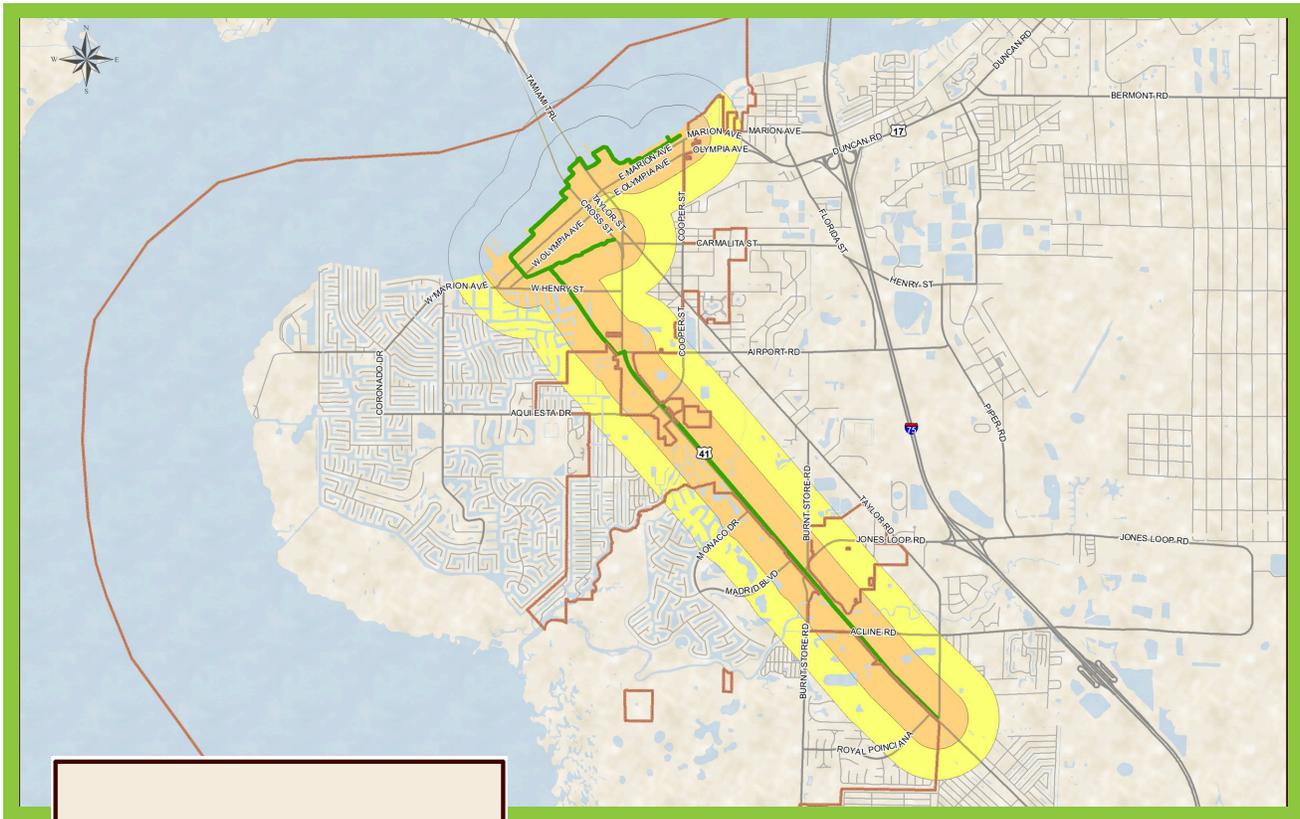
Level of Service shall be:

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



# LINEAR PARKS

## 2021 City of Punta Gorda Park LOS Map for Linear Parks - Pathways



This map illustrates the level of service (LOS) areas for Linear Parks – Pathways. The LOS standard is based upon a proximity measurement related to typical distances that can be covered by a 5 to 10 minute walk. Even though the Linear Parks – Pathways are regional attractors, these parks most directly benefit properties within a reasonable walking distance of their location.

# III. ANALYSIS & IMPLEMENTATION



# ANALYSIS & IMPLEMENTATION

## NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The purpose of Punta Gorda's Current Needs Analysis is to determine gaps between existing and desired conditions within the park system. In the past, the City has determined an acceptable Level of Service (LOS) by dividing the total acreage of the parks system by the population served. The Trust for Public Land's ParkScore Index takes into consideration accessibility, amenities, acreage, and equity in determining the optimal standard, with a goal of all residents being able to access a park within a 5- to 10-minute walk.

As seen in the Park Classification Section, each park type includes a Level of Service evaluation. The City uses a proximity metric based on a ¼ mile (5-minute walk) and ½ mile (10-minute walk) radius to determine how well the parks system is meeting residents' needs. Areas identified as underserved on the LOS maps are locations that may benefit from additional parks, trails, or other park-like amenities.

### Methodology

A 2009 study reviewed existing developed residential and commercial parcels, as well as vacant developable lands. The 2009 analysis data formed the base year of land use/parks availability from which we can track LOS progress and future needs. Over the past 15 years, the park system has expanded through development of the Punta Gorda Pathways System, which encourages active transportation and links neighborhoods to existing park facilities.

Construction of the Shreve Street and Tamiami Trail (US 41) trail segments have expanded park access in areas adjacent to those corridors, like Burnt Store Isles and Burnt Store Meadows. Annexed neighborhoods Eagle Point and Parkhill on Burnt Store Road also benefit from the Tamiami Trail (US 41) link.

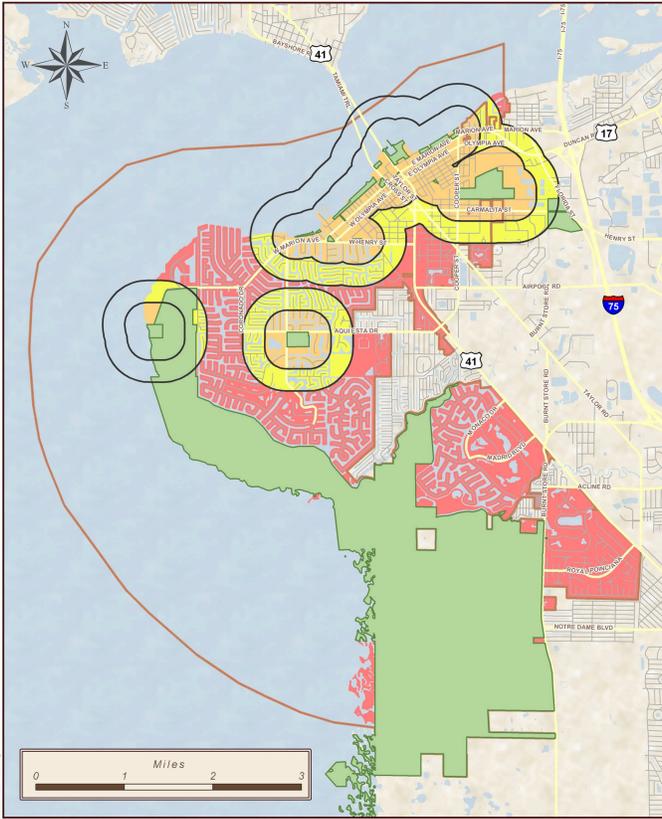
As community growth occurs, the distance from City park facilities will increase. LOS areas may need to be revised and will be re-evaluated with each update of the Charlotte County-Punta Gorda Metropolitan Planning Organization's Long Range Transportation Plan (approximately every 5 years).



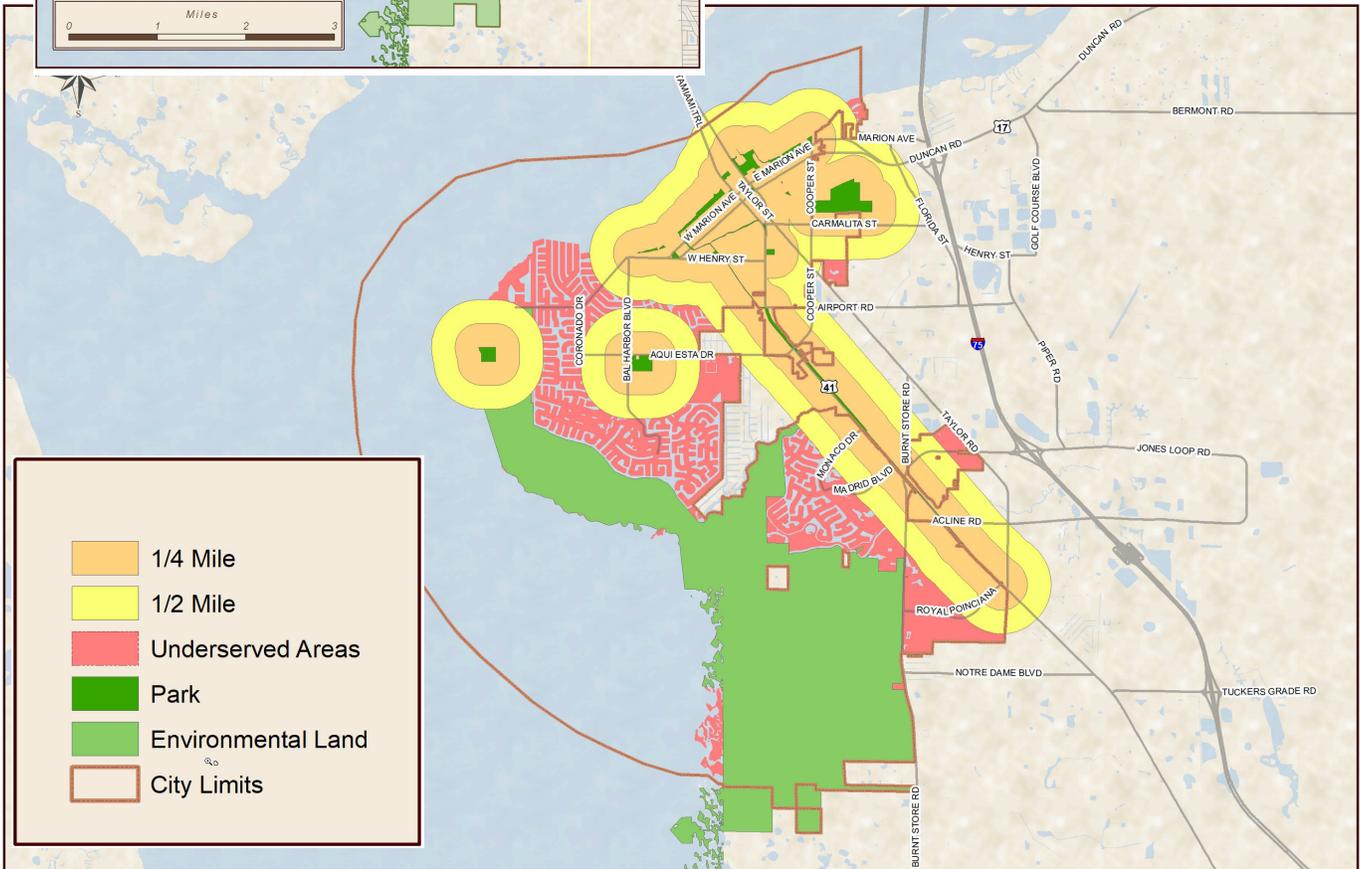
# ANALYSIS & IMPLEMENTATION

## NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

These maps illustrate the Level of Service (LOS) areas for the City's park system prior to and following the addition of the Punta Gorda Pathways trail network.



2021 Punta Gorda Park LOS Map

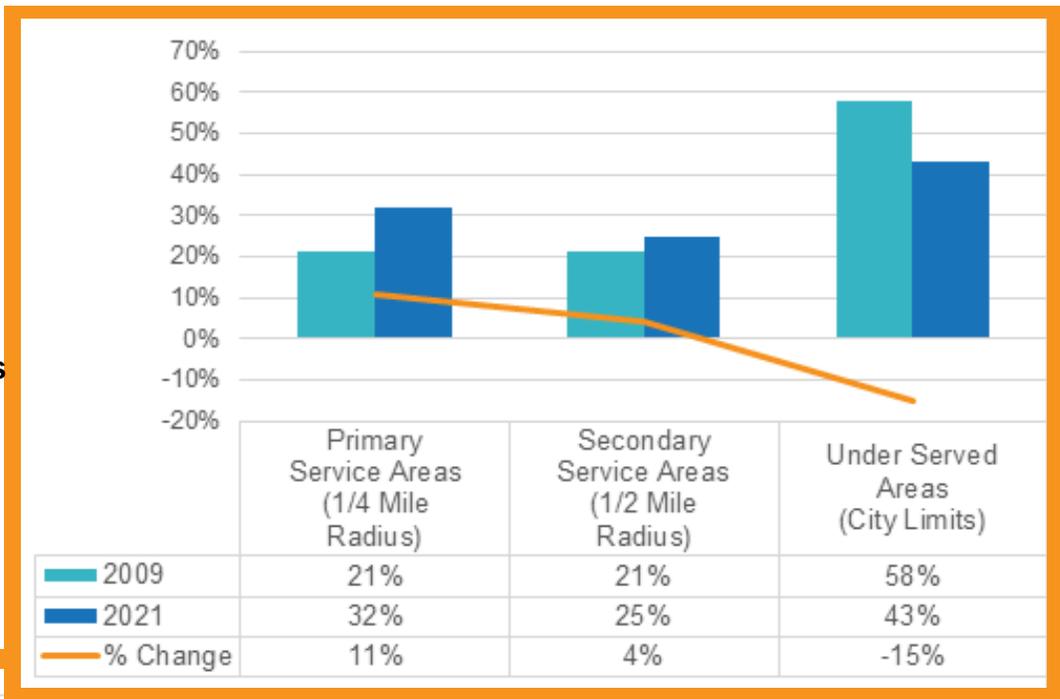


# ANALYSIS & IMPLEMENTATION

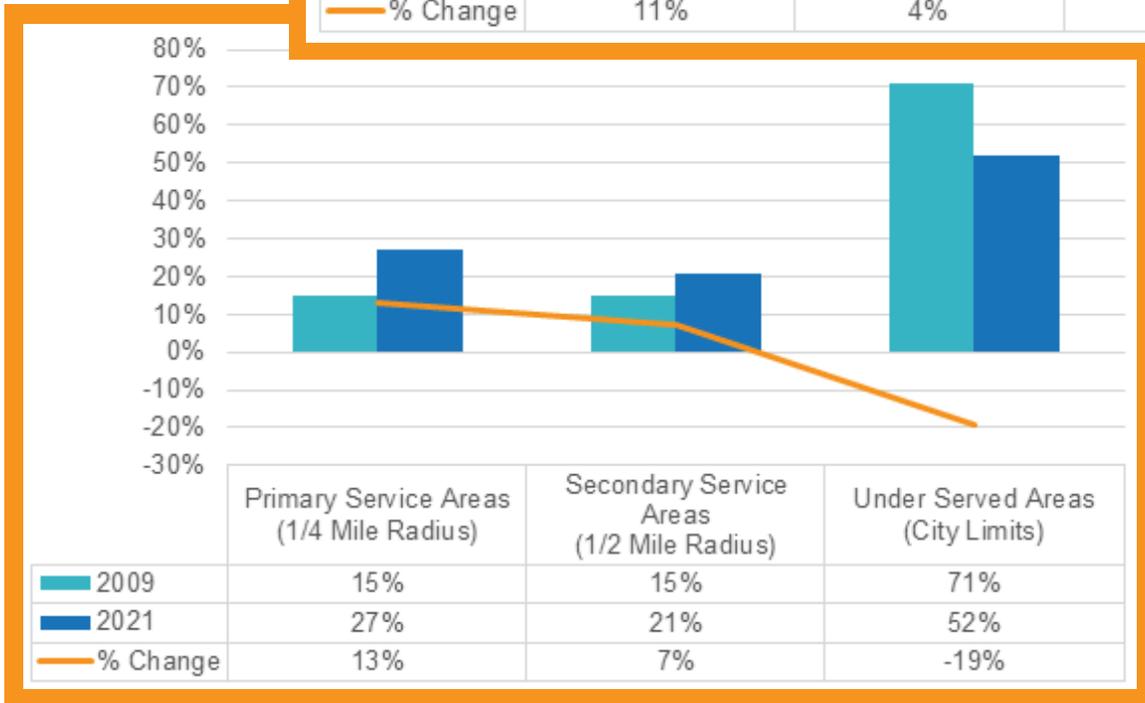
## PARK LOS IMPROVEMENTS

The City's anticipation of and response to community growth is highlighted in the Park LOS maps from 2009 and 2021. In 2009, 58% of all residential units were in areas considered underserved by parks. By 2021, 43% were in underserved areas, a reduction of 15%. Similarly, the percentage of vacant residential lands underserved by parks was reduced by 19% over this period. This positive momentum was achieved through the addition of the Shreve Street and US 41 paths within the Punta Gorda Pathways system.

**Percentage of Existing Residential Units with LOS Deficiency 2009 - 2021**



**Percentage of Vacant Residential Parcels with LOS Deficiency 2009 - 2021**



# ANALYSIS & IMPLEMENTATION

## ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION

The City strives to ensure equal access to parks by providing reasonable accommodations and modifying policies without altering the fundamental nature of programs and activities. Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA; [ada.gov](http://ada.gov)) prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in services, programs, and activities of all state and local government entities. It requires that people with disabilities have an equal opportunity to participate in the most integrated manner appropriate. The City of Punta Gorda also seeks to make its parks inclusive, and as such, build a culture of belonging by actively inviting the contribution and participation of all people.

### **Accessibility**

The 2010 ADA mandate for park and recreation departments/districts requires program access (e.g., adapted sports) through inclusive policies and procedures (e.g., provision of one-to-one aides), and through physical access to parks and facilities (i.e., elimination of architectural barriers). Agencies must make reasonable accommodations, including alterations to regular policies, procedures and practices, and provide auxiliary aides or relocate programs to an accessible site to allow a person to participate in amusement rides, boating facilities, exercise equipment, fishing piers, golf and mini-golf facilities, play areas, swimming pools, spas, and shooting facilities.

New policies are required, as well, in a Service Animal Policy and Other Power-Driven Mobility Devices (OPDMD) Policy.

Since 1993, the ADA has required an accessibility audit of all public facilities. The audit mandates identifying accessibility barriers, a means to remove the barrier, and an estimated date for removal. A Transition Plan provides parks and recreation providers not only with a detailed list of accessibility barriers, but also with a tool for budgeting, planning, and accountability. Intended as a public document, the Transition Plan shows that an entity is making a "good faith" effort toward ADA compliance.

In October 2017, the City of Punta Gorda adopted the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Transition Plan. This plan, produced by consultants Tindale Oliver, is based on an extensive data collection and analysis process that identified barriers to accessibility in various City operations, facilities, parks, and portions of the Punta Gorda Pathways system. To more fully comply with the provisions of the ADA and provide better service to our community, the City committed \$1.11 million in its Capital Improvement Program (CIP) over the five (5) year period FY2018 - FY2021 and an additional \$875,000 over the next seven (7) year period FY2022 - FY2029 (1% Sales Tax Extension) to implement recommendations of the plan.

# CITY STAFF FUNCTIONS

## ENGINEERING AND PARKS & GROUNDS

### Engineering Division

The Engineering Division has a staff of 4.5 positions (FY 2021) who provide technical support and services to all City departments. A significant subset of these services are directly related to the park system. These include project design (smaller projects), technical review of consulting engineering designs, and construction management/inspections for capital improvement projects. Larger capital improvement projects require engineering and design services from outside consultants and are supervised by the Urban Design Division.

**In FY 2020, the Engineering Division provided construction management for \$3.3 million in parks system capital improvement projects.** Projects are assigned to Engineering staff based on individual skills, project size, and type, on an as-needed basis.

In recent years, the organizational constraint of limited Engineering staff has adversely impacted construction project timing. To mitigate these delays, some construction management responsibilities have been shifted to consultants under Construction, Engineering, and Inspection (CEI) contracts on a project-by-project basis. This workaround is far from perfect, as CEI contractors still require significant oversight by Engineering Division staff.

### Parks and Grounds Division

With an annual budget of just over \$1.6 million (FY2021), the Parks and Grounds Division has a staff of 10, responsible for maintaining the entire park system, the grounds of all City facilities, landscaped medians, landscaped cul-de-sacs, street trees, and other special landscape areas within public right-of-ways.

- 120+ acres of park land
- 9 miles of Punta Gorda Pathways bicycle and pedestrian paths
- 29 acres of landscaped grounds across 6 campuses
- 19 miles of streets with trees and other special landscaping

The Division relies on numerous contractors and providers for basic tasks like landscape maintenance to highly specialized services like mangrove trimming, exotic species removal, and fountain maintenance. These contract services represent over 20% of the budget, and are managed without a Division Manager or Supervisor, as is typical within the City's organizational structure.

From 2010 to 2020, the staffing level of the Parks and Grounds Division was reduced by over 37%, from 16 positions to 10. This reduction occurred simultaneously with an increase in park infrastructure and landscaped right-of-way areas, requiring the use of outside contractors.

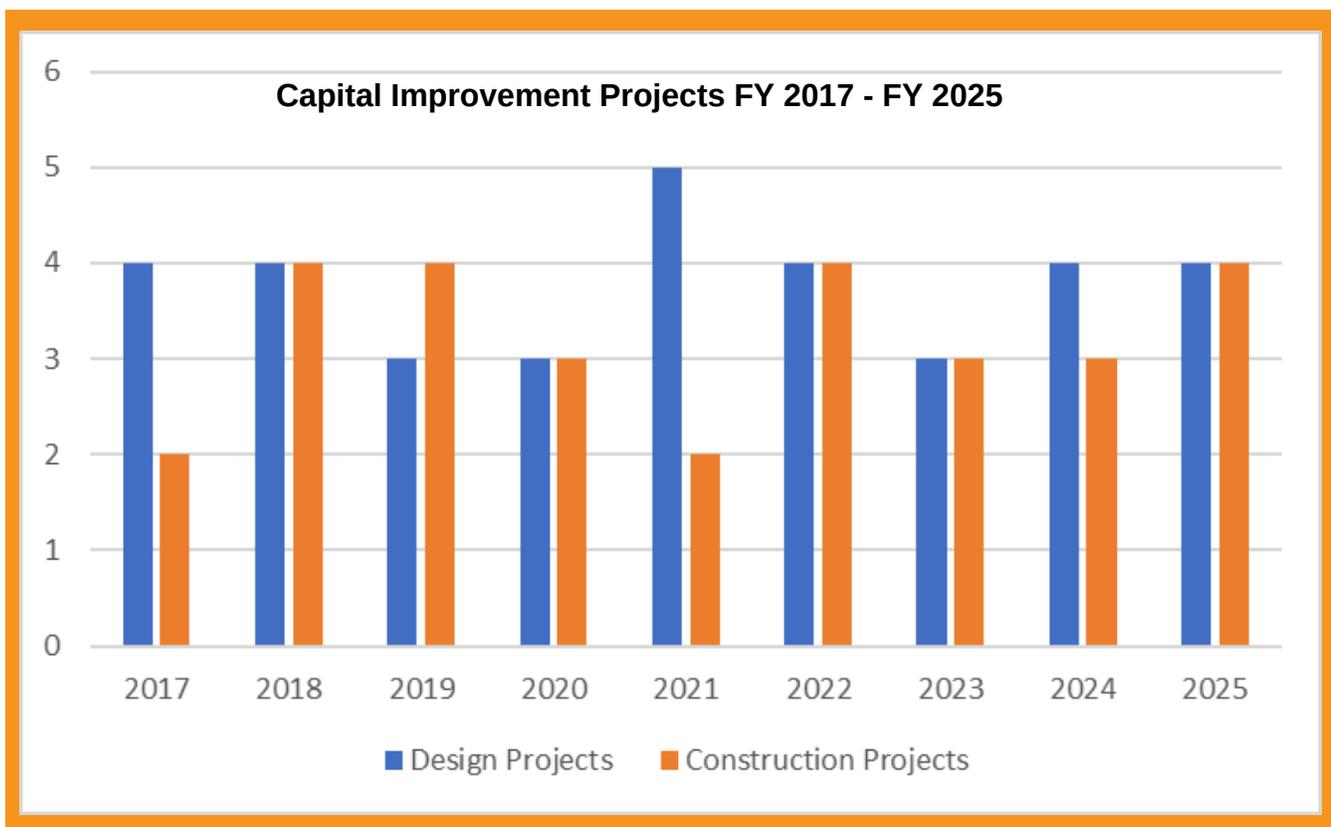
# CITY STAFF FUNCTIONS

## PLANNING DIVISION

### Planning Division

The Planning Division has a staff of 4, which provides support for all land use, transportation, and related planning activities within the City, including processing property owner/developer applications. This division also supports the City Council and several advisory boards and committees. Due to the complexity and importance of these activities, the Urban Design Director and Executive Assistant positions contribute a significant portion of their time to the Planning Division. As of the final quarter of FY 2021, one of the four funded positions remains unfilled.

Planning Division also manages a wide range of major capital improvement projects during the planning, design engineering, and funding/grants administration phases. Of the 14 major capital improvement projects in FY 2021, nine were park system-specific. Capital improvement projects require close coordination of the Finance, Procurement, Engineering, and Parks and Grounds Divisions, as well as the Public Works Department. The Planning Division staff coordinates with outside agencies like the Punta Gorda - Charlotte County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), the Florida Department of Transportation, and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP).



# CITY STAFF FUNCTIONS

## PLANNING DIVISION

Finally, Planning Division staff must effectively manage engineering design contracts to ensure that projects are prepared to meet specified objectives and community needs, as well as maintain reasonable project construction budgets.

Of the four positions within the Planning Division, only the Senior Project Manager is dedicated full-time to capital improvement project management.

Other Planning Division staff take lead responsibility for individual projects or on an as-needed basis. With one funded Planning Division position remaining unfilled as of the final quarter of FY 2021, the Urban Design Director often had to assist the Senior Project Manager and Principal Planner with capital improvement design projects. This organizational limitation represents one of several bottlenecks in the delivery of capital improvement projects.

**Planning Division Staffing Level FY 2014 - FY 2024**



This table includes the Urban Design Director and Executive Assistant positions, as these staff members devote a significant portion of their time to Planning Division activities. The 0.8 position in FY 2014 denotes a position with one unpaid furlough day per week, due to budgetary limitations. Finally, one position authorized within the FY 2021 budget remained unfilled as of the final quarter of FY 2021.

# CITY STAFF FUNCTIONS

## ZONING AND CODE COMPLIANCE

### **Zoning and Code Compliance**

The Zoning and Code Compliance Division has 6 staff positions, responsible for health, safety, and public welfare, through enforcement of the Land Development Regulations and City Code of Ordinances for property use, property maintenance, and property appearance. The Zoning and Code Compliance Division is also responsible for all event permits and park rental bookings.

Events and park rentals represent a significant portion of the programming that occurs within the parks system. In the FY 2021 Budget, the cost for park system-specific services provided by the Zoning and Code Compliance Division was estimated at \$23,000. However, this may be a significant underestimate, as the City's existing IT systems cannot adequately calculate task tracking for budgetary and management purposes.

Reviewing and processing event permits primarily falls to the Zoning Official, the Zoning and Code Compliance Division Manager. On an as-needed basis, Planning Division staff provides support for event permits. In FY 2019, over 100 permits were processed. These permitted events can occur within the park system, on City streets, or on private properties.

Event permits require review by the Zoning and Code Compliance Division staff and consideration by the Development Review Committee (DRC). A subset of event permits, due to their size, proposed park uses, or site configurations, also require review and approval by City Council. The variability of individual event permits makes tracking labor hours difficult. A simple event permit may require only 2-3 hours over the course of a few weeks before final approval by DRC. By contrast, a complex event permit may consume 20 to 40 hours or more of the Zoning and Code Compliance Division staff time over the course of several months, with pre-permit meetings, coordination with other departments (Public Works, Police, Fire), and DRC and City Council agenda preparation and meetings.

The Zoning and Code Compliance Division is also responsible for booking rentals of available park facilities and open spaces. These duties are generally handled by the Code Compliance Executive Assistant, with support, as needed, by other Zoning and Code Compliance Division staff.

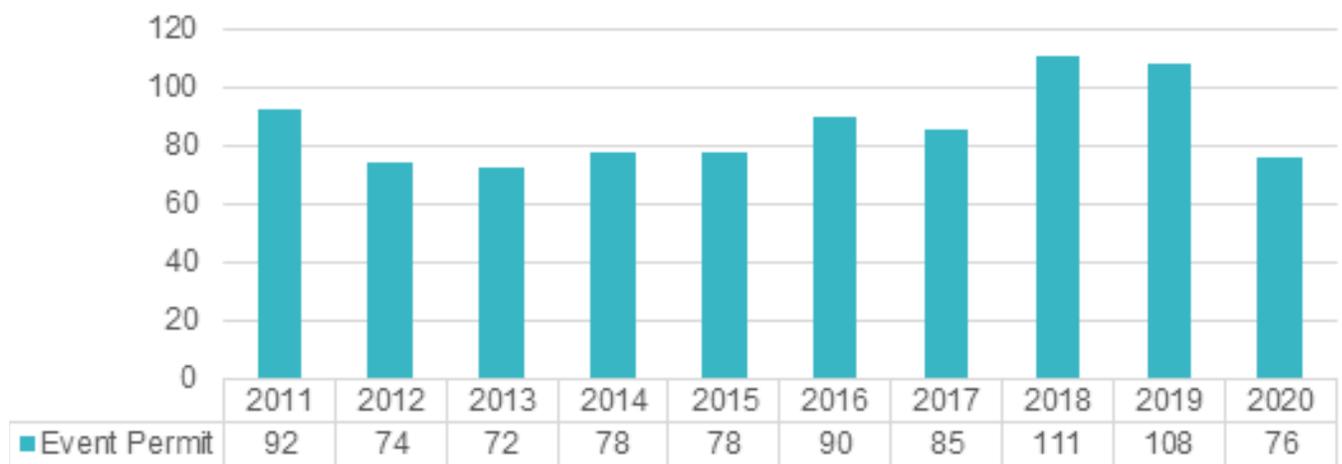
# CITY STAFF FUNCTIONS

## ZONING AND CODE COMPLIANCE

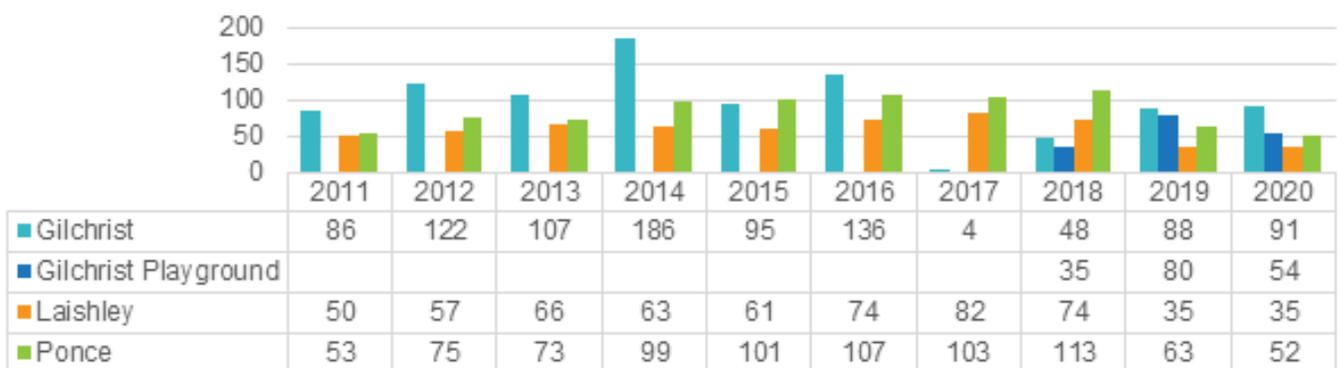
### Zoning and Code Compliance

The tables below provide the number of events and park rentals (FY 2011 - FY2020). While event and park rental processing consumes a significant amount of City staff time and resources, revenues generated by these activities are fairly small. Given the importance of events/rentals to the activation of the parks and our community's vibrancy, however, process enhancements are needed to reduce costs and enhance revenues.

### Event Permit Applications FY 2011 - FY 2020



### Park Rental Applications FY 2011 - FY 2020



**Note:** Gilchrist Park was under construction in 2017 and a portion of 2018. The playground was rentable beginning FY 2018 with the completion of a major capital improvement project.

# IV. GOALS, STRATEGIES & ACTIONS



# GOALS, STRATEGIES & ACTIONS

## MASTER PLAN GOALS

### GOAL 1: SYSTEM OF PARKS AND RECREATION FACILITIES

The City shall continue to expand, develop, and provide parks and recreation programs and facilities that enhance quality of life, improve public health and safety, and meet the needs and interests of people who live, work, and play in Punta Gorda.

#### Strategy

- Provide a high-quality, diversified parks and recreation system for all age groups.
- Ensure that all relevant demographic groups are represented during park planning.
- Provide operations and maintenance to ensure safe, serviceable, and functional parks and facilities.
- Develop, fund, and implement future capital improvement programs that are consistent with the Master Plan.
- Encourage facilities that strengthen cultural diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Identify needed facility and amenity improvements to ensure accessibility, connectivity, and regional integration of the park system.

#### Measurable Outcomes

1. Develop a parks-oriented set of sustainability design guidelines by 2030.
2. Conduct a community-wide attitude and interest survey to determine needs and desires of park users by 2030.
3. Track and report PRMP progress annually, and complete a comprehensive plan every 10 years.

#### Action

- Develop new facilities that will expand recreational opportunities for all residents.
- Add capacity at existing parks by expanding facilities to accommodate an increasing population.
- Work with developers to identify additional park opportunities in redeveloping areas.
- Research and develop an Action Plan to increase public awareness of park benefits.
- Conduct a community-wide attitude and interest survey to determine current and future needs and desires of park users.
- Revise Land Development Regulations to be consistent with the goals of the Park and Recreation Master Plan.
- Work in conjunction with other City departments to develop a parks-oriented set of sustainability design guidelines.
- Provide an annual Park and Recreation Master Plan report of progress and a complete plan evaluation every 10 years.

# GOALS, STRATEGIES & ACTIONS

## MASTER PLAN GOALS

### GOAL 2: FACILITIES AND AMENITIES MAINTENANCE

The City shall provide a system of parks and recreation facilities that are sustainably managed and economically and efficiently operated, serving the community for years to come.

#### Strategy

- Develop a maintenance and operational standards manual that provides staff direction on how facilities are operated, maintained, and managed.
- Define and implement standards that staff can fully understand and monitor.
- Establish and maintain an aesthetically-pleasing, safe, accessible, and connected park system.
- Design and develop facilities that reduce overall maintenance, operation requirements, and costs.
- Ensure long-term maintenance of parks.

#### Measurable Outcomes

1. Develop a comprehensive Parks and Recreation Standards Manual by 2030.
2. Develop a long-range plan to replace park and playground equipment that does not meet established safety guidelines by 2030.
3. Develop a facilities maintenance program to plan for life cycle and replacement costs by 2030.

#### Action

- Perform regular inspections of all facilities, parks, trails, and open spaces.
- Develop a maintenance management system to estimate and plan for life cycle maintenance and replacement costs.
- Develop maintenance standards for individual parks, trails, and facilities.
- Include maintenance projects and annual maintenance needs as part of the annual budget process.
- Inspect and maintain existing park equipment for safety.
- Identify and develop a long-range plan to replace all playground equipment that does not meet CPSC (Consumer Product Safety Commission) or ASTM (American Society for Testing and Materials) guidelines.
- Re-establish park design standards for site furniture, colors, and material types.

# GOALS, STRATEGIES & ACTIONS

## MASTER PLAN GOALS

### GOAL 3: ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSIVITY

Create parks and facilities that ensure adequate safety and accessibility, and cultivate a culture that encourages participation, collaboration, flexibility, and fairness to enable individuals to excel to their full health and wellness potential.

#### Strategy

- Develop new facilities and renovate existing facilities to meet or exceed ADA guidelines, in keeping with the principals of Universal Accessibility.
- Design facilities and structure programs to allow for barrier-free, equal access.
- Support the health and wellness of the entire community with facilities and programs that inspire and encourage use by all ages and abilities.
- Develop and maintain facilities that will serve the community's demographics, while considering the evolutionary aspect and multiple stages of people's lives.
- Develop, maintain, and operate parks and recreation facilities in a manner that induces a sense of safety, accessibility, and positivity.

#### Action

- Review population data to determine distribution by age, gender, income, and ethnicity and plan activities of interest to a variety of individuals and groups.
- Provide activities and experiences that can be enjoyed by persons of multiple ages.
- Evaluate and implement the City's ADA Transition Plan on an ongoing basis.
- Utilize Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) methods, programs, and techniques in the design and maintenance of park facilities.
- Develop a community outreach campaign to target marginalized groups.
- Identify and replace park amenities that do not comply with ADA guidelines.

#### Measurable Outcomes

1. Evaluate all parks and recreation facilities, and document needed improvements to ensure barrier-free, equal access for individuals of all abilities by 2030.
2. Systematically complete and document park enhancements by 2040.
3. Conduct a community outreach campaign to encourage participants of all abilities by 2035.

# GOALS, STRATEGIES & ACTIONS

## MASTER PLAN GOALS

### GOAL 4: LEVEL OF SERVICE

The City shall develop and maintain a system of public parks distributed throughout the community that provides a variety of recreational opportunities for residents and businesses.

#### Strategy

- Maintain a parks system that is within a 5-10 minute walk and a ¼ to ½ mile of residential homes and commercial businesses.
- Develop a long-term plan to identify and remedy the deficiencies in level of service.
- Identify the recreational needs of the public, both now and in the future.
- Expand our high-quality system of multi-use trails and bicycle and pedestrian corridors, to provide park access to neighborhoods, public facilities, and businesses.

#### Measurable Outcomes

1. Develop a 5-year Capital Improvement Plan for park Level of Service (LOS) needs by 2030.

#### Action

- Identify needed park lands in areas that are underserved.
- Acquire new and expand existing parklands to meet service standards.
- Identify demographic trends that may influence future needs of our residents.
- Determine future possible uses for existing facilities to include highest and best use of all buildings and open spaces.
- Develop five (5) year Capital Improvement Plan for future level of service needs.
- Evaluate and monitor the Level of Service (LOS) through regular inspections and provide needed staff and resources to ensure continuous performance of the park system and user expectations.
- Ensure that the design and location of parks and trails reflect that active living and walkability are important to Punta Gorda's quality of life.
- Construct walking paths, wherever possible, to connect residential areas with schools, parks, and other public facilities.

# GOALS, STRATEGIES & ACTIONS

## MASTER PLAN GOALS

### GOAL 5: ADMINISTRATION MANAGEMENT

Establish, maintain, and operate parks, facilities, and programs in a manner that is cost-effective and manageable while engaging the community in a manner that maximizes involvement and support.

#### Strategy

- Establish a Parks and Recreation Division that is fiscally sustainable.
- Seek agency accreditation through the National Recreation and Park Association's (NRPA) Commission for Accreditation of Parks and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA), within the next five (5) years.
- Provide easily accessible recreational programs, facilities, and parks information.
- Evaluate and enhance all facilities and parks for quality patron experience.

#### Measurable Outcomes

1. Obtain National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) accreditation by 2035.
2. Establish a City Parks and Recreation Division with a strategic direction vision, goals, and objectives by 2035.
3. Develop a Programs and Services Management Plan for Recreational Programming by 2035.
4. The City Council, by 2025, shall direct the City Manager to appoint a staff member as the final point of accountability for overseeing the management and implementation of any steps authorized by City Council in accordance with this plan.

#### Action

- Establish a Parks and Recreation Division, with a strategic direction, vision, goals, and objectives.
- Outline planning functions within the Parks and Recreation Division. The standard includes having a least one staff member or a consultant with planning capabilities.
- Provide a fiscal policy, revenue policy, grant procedures, policy for the acceptance of gifts and donations, and procedures for receiving support from private and non-profit organizations for the Division.
- Devise a Programs and Services Management for Recreational Programming Plan, methods for updating the plan, and a public leisure education program.
- Develop a self-assessment report and prepare associated supporting documents using CAPRA standards.
- Utilize the NRPA Field Report or other benchmarking to evaluate staffing levels.
- Work with Human Resources to evaluate classifications and pay scales for staff.
- Research and develop an action plan to increase public awareness of park benefits.

# GOALS, STRATEGIES & ACTIONS

## MASTER PLAN GOALS

### GOAL 6: BUDGET, CAPITAL, AND FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

Develop and strengthen current funding sources and economic opportunities.

#### Strategy

- Increase the amount of funding available by using State, Federal, and private grants, where feasible.
- Develop alternative funding sources to offset park maintenance and operations.
- Consider the impact of operations and maintenance costs before construction of any new facilities or amenities, and prioritize those with lower impacts.
- Develop forecasting methodologies for revenues, expenses and year-end projections.
- Ensure that the Parks and Recreation system is economically and environmentally sustainable.
- Properly charge for special events, facility usage, and general maintenance to keep the facilities available for public use.
- Monitor and adjust maintenance staffing as needed to meet the current demand for services, and develop a staffing plan for future growth.

#### Action

- Annually review programs and services to assist with re-allocation of resources to prioritize service level needs.
- Perform a comprehensive rental and event rate study.
- Create a dedicated parks and recreation operations and maintenance fund that ensures adequate operations and maintenance for all facilities.
- Ensure that every new park or facility has an identified fund for ongoing operations and maintenance.
- Seek and utilize a variety of funding sources for capital and operational expenses.

#### Measurable Outcomes

1. Complete a comprehensive rental and event rate study to determine actual City costs associated with each event by 2035.
2. Secure a dedicated parks and recreation operations/maintenance fund by 2035.
3. Seek new funding sources for parks and recreation capital projects and operations expenses by 2035.

# GOALS, STRATEGIES & ACTIONS

## MASTER PLAN GOALS

### GOAL 7: SUSTAINABILITY

The City will incorporate and utilize best practices in environmental stewardship, sustainable technologies, and conservation of natural resources.

#### Strategy

- Incorporate low-impact development techniques into park and trail designs, and be a leader in demonstrating sustainable building practices.
- Utilize water conservation methods and technologies in development of irrigation infrastructure.
- Encourage the removal of invasive species, the planting of native species, and the re-establishment of natural areas to allow native communities to thrive.
- Improve habitat within urban parks and facilities.
- Use native species occurring naturally on similar sites in ecological restoration projects when feasible.
- Maintain and expand tree canopy coverage and manage forest diseases to protect native biological diversity and critical ecosystem functions.
- Support development of blue trails along the Harbor.
- Increase public access to the river through land acquisition and facility development for fishing, canoe, kayak, and boat access, wildlife viewing, and overall river access.

#### Action

- Inventory critical and sensitive wildlife habitats and develop management strategies for their protection.
- Develop training materials and programs for City personnel, contractors, and volunteers on best management practices to prevent the entry of invasive plants and maintenance of existing native plants.
- Work with county, state, and federal agencies to identify and control feral or pest populations that have a negative impact on plants and/or wildlife.
- Continue to implement the Climate Adaptation Plan.
- Seek grant funding opportunities for specific projects but ensure funding is available to maintain restored areas to prevent issues from emerging after the project is complete.

#### Measurable Outcomes

1. Inventory critical and sensitive wildlife habitats and develop a strategy for their protection by 2030.
2. Develop materials for City personnel, contractors, and volunteers to identify and prevent the entry of invasive plants by 2030.

# GOALS, STRATEGIES & ACTIONS

## MASTER PLAN GOALS

### GOAL 8: PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATIONS

Promote the park system to existing and potential users within the city, county, and region.

#### Strategy

- Utilize social media to promote/foster community engagement.
- Develop partnerships to encourage the use of parks for public health and disease prevention.
- Promote recreational bicycle and water trail tourism.
- Seek new and support existing cooperative agreements with local governmental units in the development and operation of parks and recreation facilities.
- Formalize and strengthen partnerships with volunteer groups.
- Support and strengthen resident opportunities for involvement, volunteerism, and giving in support of parks, recreation, and trails.
- Maintain the unique small-town, old Florida charm of Punta Gorda by preserving and reinforcing historic resources.
- Encourage developers to provide walking paths and neighborhood parks within large private developments.

#### Action

- Provide public access to electronic versions of park documents, plans, and forms on the City's website.
- Regularly create/revise partnership agreements to ensure fair and equitable relationships.
- Develop an annual parks marketing plan with measurable performance indicators.
- Promote parks through special events and seasonal activities.
- Ensure that the history and culture of the City is reflected in the park and recreation system.
- Create partnerships and concessionaire agreements to allow for outside providers to provide recreational services on City land.
- Seek community users (organizations, individuals) for recreational facilities.

#### Measurable Outcomes

1. Determine feasibility of dedicated parks and recreation staff that will develop parks marketing plan/goals with measurable performance indicators by 2035.
2. Ensure public availability of electronic versions of park documents, plans, and forms on the City's website by 2025.

# V. CONCLUSION



# CONCLUSION: WHAT'S NEXT

Parks are valuable features, regional attractions for events and activities, a means of protecting and nurturing nature, and an economic engine for our community. In short, parks form the basic building blocks of our beautiful city. Residents and visitors alike enjoy Punta Gorda's park system and envision future growth and improvements to meet their social and recreational needs.

The 2024 Park and Recreation Master Plan Goals 1 - 8 provide a planning guideline for facilities and maintenance, administration, budgeting, sustainability, and Level of Service (LOS).

These goals, combined with the list of short-, intermediate- and long-term projects, will enable City Council and staff to methodically achieve an enhanced park system for our rapidly growing community.

In 1884, Isaac Trabue envisioned waterfront lands as public spaces to enrich the lives of residents of his new development. In 2024, the City of Punta Gorda builds on this vision, respectful of the past, cognizant of our challenges, and optimistic for the future.



## VI. APPENDIX



# PUNTA GORDA HISTORY

The City of Punta Gorda has evolved greatly since its founding in 1884, when Colonel Isaac Trabue purchased 30 acres of land from James Madison Lanier, a hunter and trapper. Planner Kelly B. Harvey was hired to plat out the new town, named "Trabue." To ensure the development's success, Isaac Trabue convinced the Florida Southern Railway to extend its rail line south, and in 1886, the first group of land developers and tourists arrived. However, in 1887, discouraged by the town's lack of infrastructure, thirty-four townspeople voted to rename the town Punta Gorda (Spanish for "fat point"), in recognition of the point on which the town was located. With streets and blocks arranged along the southern shores of Charlotte Harbor, every waterfront block was designated as a park, a legacy that serves the city to this day.

The Hotel Punta Gorda opened for business in 1887. A railroad spur brought wealthy passengers down King Street (now US 41), directly to the doors of the grand hotel, whose grounds were planted with palm trees and tropical flowers. People from all over the world visited the fledgling town to sail, hunt, fish, and relax. Punta Gorda began to thrive, thanks to seasonal visitors, agricultural trade, and commercial fishing. In 1888, phosphate was discovered on the banks of the Peace River. In 1896, the Florida Times-Union reported that phosphate mining was Punta Gorda's chief industry and that the town was, in fact,

the world's greatest phosphate shipping point. By 1907, a rail line extending to Port Boca Grande ended Punta Gorda's brief shipping boom. The city's successes continued to ebb and flow, along with the national economy, real estate cycles, and through World War II, when the Punta Gorda Army Air Field was built to train fighter pilots before they were sent overseas.

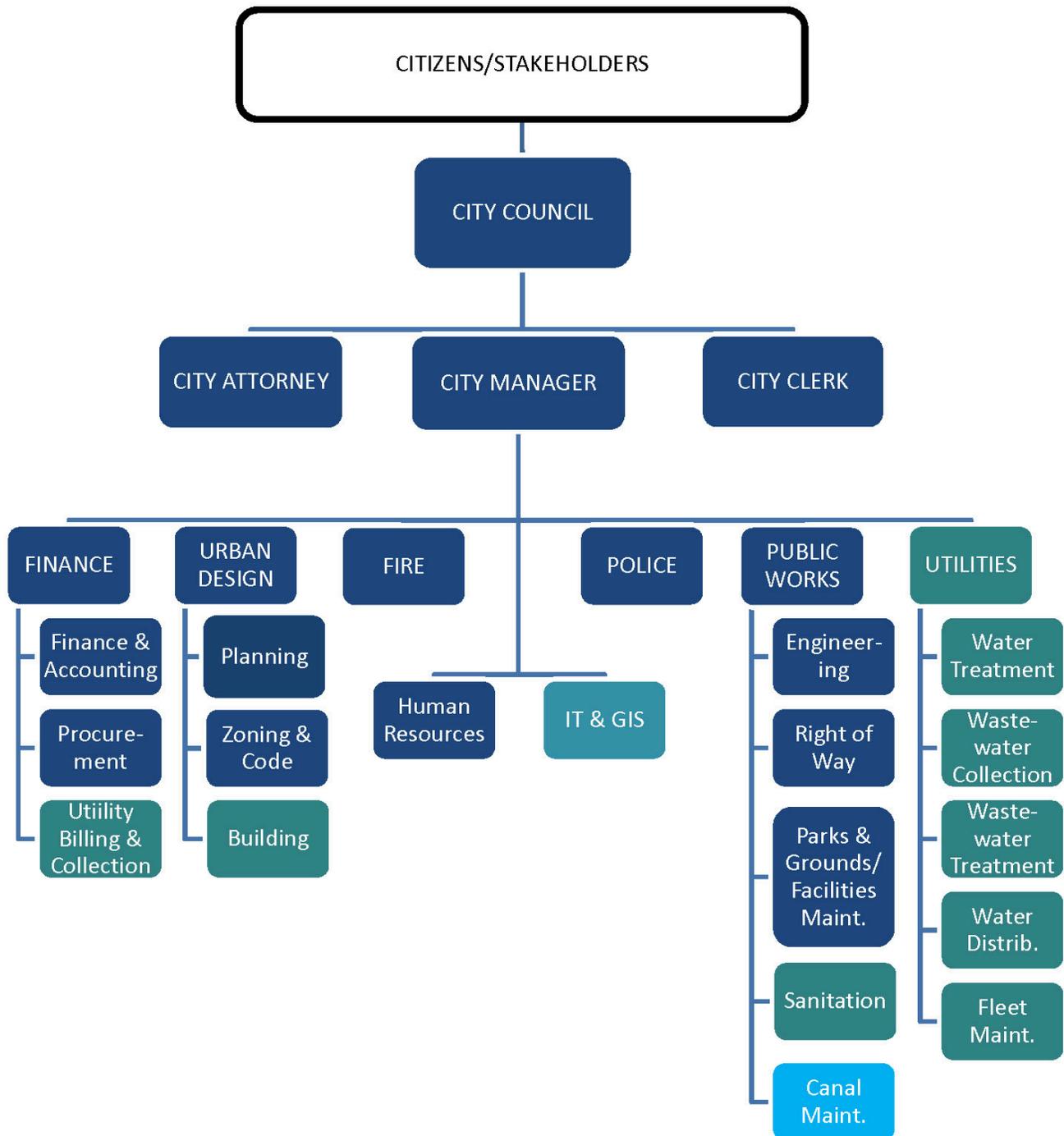
In the late 1950s, another building surge began, with new subdivisions connecting Charlotte Harbor to the Punta Gorda Isles and Burnt Store Isles neighborhoods. Retirees flocked from the north, attracted by Florida's winter warmth and sunshine. Fisherman's Village arrived in 1980 on the site of the former Maud Street City Docks. Shops, restaurants, lodging, and entertainment have made this complex a vital attraction for residents and visitors alike.

Challenges like the Hotel Punta Gorda fire in 1959, Hurricane Charley in 2004, and Hurricane Ian in 2022 have vastly changed the city's landscape, but a sense of optimism and perseverance have revived the community every time. With its small-town atmosphere, waterfront parks, walking/biking trails, arts and entertainment, downtown corridor, and independent shops and restaurants, Punta Gorda continues to benefit from the pride and preservation of its rich, unique history.

# CITY ORGANIZATION CHART

The City of Punta Gorda is a Council-Manager form of government, which combines the political leadership of elected officials with the managerial experience of a hired administrator. City Council acts as the legislative branch and operates in accordance with the provisions of the City's Charter. The Council is responsible for setting the policies to which the City Manager and City departments adhere.

## CITY OF PUNTA GORDA, FL ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE BUDGET FY 2024



# PARK POP-IN COMMENTS

**Park Pop-In: Lashley Park**

**Date: July 10, 2020**

**Number of Respondents: 40 - 50**

## **Positives**

- It is beautiful, no problems
- Beautiful, excellent (visitor from Winter Haven)
- No need for improvement, I love it! I go running here all the time
- The family loves it
- I love it!
- Great park, no changes
- We walk it every morning
- We drive all the way here and think it is special (North Port residents)
- Parks are beautiful
- Very nice!
- Well kept
- I come here to walk (North Port Resident)
- We love them!
- It's awesome
- We love walking here all the time
- Love the pickleball and tennis courts
- Beautiful park (visitors)
- Love the wide open space!
- What more could we add? It's perfect!

## **Suggestions/Improvements**

- Less people smoking and throwing trash on the ground; We pick up the cigarettes and trash when we walk the park
- More water features at the splash pads
- More playground equipment
- More cool drinking fountains and trash containers (mangroves area)
- Add swings, hammocks and pools!
- Jungle gyms for kids
- Make dogs allowed (Ponce Park)
- Widen the Harborwalk (bottleneck areas)
- Fix the potholes in the parking lot (Dog Park)
- Fans under the pavilion/gazebo
- Dedicated fitness person or entertainment coordinator
- More shading on the splash pads
- More patrols (2 – 4 a.m.)
- Complete bike paths
- Water theme park
- Plants to hide electrical

# PARK POP-IN COMMENTS

## Park Pop-In: Gilchrist Park

Date: July 17, 2020

Number of Respondents: 50 - 60

### Positives

- Beautiful
- Doing a great job!
- Love it and I moved here permanently
- Love the park
- Park is wonderful
- Happy the way the park is (x2)
- All good!
- Use it every day!
- Clean bathrooms
- We are visiting; wish we had this back home
- Love the waterfront
- Mangroves at Linear Park are nice

### Suggestions/Improvements

- More shade structures
- Floors to be made of permeable materials
- Complete the path
- "There's no end to the improvements"
- More sitting areas
- More playgrounds (all parks)
- Keep the parks opened (Covid-19)

### Suggestions/Improvements (continued)

- Bikes on path going TOO fast, especially around the corners
- Remove fencing around the pickleball courts
- Dedicated bike path
- Update gazebo
- Remove pickleball covers; they're ugly
- Remove the boats (3 abandoned ones have sunk)
- Leave bathrooms open longer
- Open the parks (Covid-19)
- More seating for groups
- Food trucks
- Sidewalk on Marion Ave is too narrow (4x4 piling use wood to protect walkers)
- Bicycle full lane sign by/on Marion Bridge
- More shade
- Shaded playground (fully shaded)
- Cooler water and filtration system
- Keep pickleball
- Pickleball needs to be redone
- Put more money into the tennis courts
- Need a park and recreation department
- Better locations for trash cans
- Speed bumps near linear park
- Less pickleball

# PARK POP-IN COMMENTS

**Park Pop-In: Ponce de Leon Park**

**Date: July 24, 2020**

**Number of Respondents: 20 - 30**

## **Positives**

- We loved it!
- 1st time visitors!
- Returning to the area after 22 years in the military!
- Love it! It is clean and the sidewalks are wide
- “Don’t know how it can get any better”
- I like it

## **Suggestions/Improvements**

- Bigger slide
- Kids’ shelter in playground
- Spinning toy thing
- Would like for there to be a map of the park
- Bathroom needs improvement
- Replace benches and add more
- Update playground
- Fix road surface near the bathroom – “It’s an accident waiting to happen”
- More hiking trails
- Kayak/Canoe launch
- Better playground
- A water fountain
- Upgrade the park
- More splashpads for kids

# PARK POP-IN COMMENTS

**Park Pop-In: Bailey Brothers' Park**

**Date: July 31, 2020**

**Number of Respondents: Not Noted**

## **Positives**

- Shade is great
- Calm area
- Love to sit and talk here

## **Suggestions/Improvements**

- Trees need to be pruned

**Park Pop-In: Corner of Marion and Taylor**

**Date: July 31, 2020**

**Number of Respondents: 10**

## **Positives**

- I love the parks
- Love the music
- City staff is doing a good job

## **Suggestions/Improvements**

- Lighting is an issue
- Would like to enjoy the parks in the evening
- Need more places to sit when you don't have a chair
- Decent walking path
- Make sure there is shade

# MEASURABLE OUTCOMES CHECKLIST: SAMPLE

## City of Punta Gorda 2024 PRMP Measurable Outcomes Checklist

GOAL	MEASURABLE OUTCOMES	DATE DUE	DATE COMPLETE
1. System of Parks and Recreation Facilities	Develop a parks-oriented set of sustainability design guidelines	2030	
	Conduct a new community-wide parks attitude and interest survey	2030	
	Track and report Parks and Recreation Master Plan progress annually	2025	
	Complete new comprehensive parks master plan every 10 years	2034	
2. Facilities and Amenities Maintenance	Develop a comprehensive Parks and Rec Standards Manual	2030	
	Develop long-range plan to replace playground equipment that does not meet established safety guidelines	2030	
	Develop a park facilities maintenance system to plan for life cycle and replacement costs	2030	
3. Accessibility and Inclusivity	Evaluate all park facilities and document needed improvements to ensure barrier-free, equal access	2030	
	Systematically complete and document enhancements	2040	
	Conduct a community outreach campaign to encourage park participants of all abilities	2035	
4. Level of Service (LOS)	Develop a 5-year capital improvement plan for parks' LOS needs	2030	
5. Administration Management	Achieve National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) accreditation	2035	
	Establish a City Parks and Recreation Division with strategic direction, vision, goals, objectives.	2035	
	Develop a Programs and Services Management Plan for Recreational Programming	2035	
6. Budget, Capital and Fiscal Responsibility	Complete a comprehensive rental and event rate study to determine City costs associated with events	2035	
	Secure a dedicated parks and recreation operations/maintenance fund	2035	
	Seek new funding sources for parks and recreation capital projects and operations expenses	2035	
7. Sustainability	Inventory critical and sensitive wildlife habitats and develop a strategy for their protection	2030	
	Develop materials for City personnel, contractors, and volunteers to identify and prevent the entry of invasive plants	2030	
8. Community Partnerships & Collaborations	Evaluate/revise partnership agreements to ensure fair and equitable community relationships	2025	
	Ensure public availability of electronic versions of park documents, plans and forms on the City's website	2025	

**Reserved for PRMP Project Updates  
Excel Spreadsheet**

# PUNTA GORDA'S PLACE TO PLAY

City of Punta Gorda, Florida \* Urban Design Department

