

Key Design Considerations for Neighborhood Parks

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Key Words

Neighborhood Parks, Design, Active Recreation, Passive Recreation, Safety

Background

Neighborhood parks are typically the simplest form of park within the municipal park system. The purpose of neighborhood parks is to provide spaces and opportunities for both informal active and passive recreation. When designed well, they will also serve as the social and activity core for the neighborhood.^{1,2}

Neighborhood parks are typically:

- ¼ - ½ mile in distance from neighborhood houses^{1,2}
- Not cut off from the neighborhood by major roads¹
- Free from physical barriers that would prohibit walkable access to the park^{1,2}
- Designed for all age and user groups^{1,2}



Neighborhood parks should be developed and designed for community residents living close to the park. Good designs include elements that encourage use and enjoyment for children of all ages, adults, elderly, and special populations. Designs should focus on the neighborhood use level and minimize facilities and programs that would attract large numbers of visitors, cars, lighting, and noise.^{1,2}

Design and park operations are often structured to sustain and celebrate existing neighborhood qualities, natural features, and community cultures.^{1,2} An NRPA guideline is that "...active recreation spaces should consume roughly 50% of the park's acreage. The remaining 50% should be using for passive activities, reserve, ornamentation, and conservation as appropriate (p. 99)."¹

Common neighborhood park features include:^{1,2,3,4}

- Meandering walking paths/ trails
- Natural settings
- Playscapes (appropriate for various ages)
- Linkages to other neighborhood infrastructure and trails
- Benches
- Signage
- Lighting
- General open spaces
- Views of Nature
- Picnic tables
- Dog bag stations, if appropriate
- Pavilion(s)
- Courts
- Open access ball/ sports fields
- Trash receptacles
- Limited parking spaces

Implementing an inclusive citizen input process can assist planners and decisions makers in working with residents to identify and prioritize key park design elements.^{5,6}

Local residents can also work with planners, park professionals, and decision makers to design features to help keep the park safe. Proper lighting, easy upkeep, and sittable spaces that create “eyes on the park” are a few techniques that will positively influence crime rates by deterring negative activities.^{3,4} Maintaining the park by picking up trash, minimizing graffiti with public art and plantings, and keeping equipment in good working order can also help foster safer park environments.^{3,4}

When designing neighborhood parks, it is important to select feasible designs and elements the staff and community members can sustain. Leaders and citizens should prioritize elements that can support intended parks uses and outcomes but that can be maintained over time with the available fiscal, staff, and volunteer resources.

What Communities Can Do

- Engage in or update a planning process which emphasizes practices that address local citizens input;
- Develop implementation and monitoring processes to ensure the plan achieves its intended goals;
- Work together to maintain the park and keep it safe.

Relevant Extension Resources

For information or assistance in engaging in a citizen input process or educational sessions on relevant park topics, contact your local county agent or Extension specialist.

For reading resources visit the AgriLife Extension Bookstore at: <https://agrilifebookstore.org/>

- Parkland and Open Space Planning: Urban and Municipal Park Programs (agrilife.org/urbanparks)
- Parkland Dedication Ordinances in Texas: A missed Opportunity. Texas AgriLife Bookstore Publication E-233

References

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2. Cooper Marcus, C. (1998). *People places: Design guidelines for urban open space*.
3. *Creating Safe Park Environments to Enhance Community Wellness*. Acquired from NRPA.org.
4. *Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) Training Manual*. National Institute of Crime Prevention. www.CPTEDTraining.net
5. Landau, S. and Walker, J.R. *Framework Driven Citizen Input Processes*. Available at: agrilife.org/urbanparks/
6. Walker, J.R. and Landau, S. *Engaging Citizen Input Activities: Getting out of the Box*. Available at: agrilife.org/urbanparks/

