

## RECREATION & OPEN SPACE ELEMENT

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# Recreation & Open Space Element

## Vision

*A City with a diverse range of recreational activities and facilities that promote strong family relationships, social interaction, individual growth, and an active and healthy lifestyle.*

*A City with a natural landscape that provides a beautiful setting for its neighborhoods.*

*A City which recognizes the value of its natural assets and has taken steps to conserve the quality of its environment.*

## Introduction

The City's Land Use Policies encourage infill development near established transportation corridors in order to reduce the pressure for unnecessary sprawl in suburban and rural areas. The City's Land Use Policies also provide for the maintenance and enhancement of recreation and open space amenities. These Policies are significant because only two percent of the City's land area remains undeveloped. Park sites and natural open space areas improve quality of life in La Mesa and the surrounding Region by providing opportunities for citizens to engage in outdoor recreation and scenic enjoyment. For the purpose of definition the City's recreation resources, parklands and open space are provided in the following basic forms:

- Urban public parks;
- Private recreational amenities and open space;
- Regional-serving public lands such as beaches lake shores, forest lands, and regional parks; and

### Recreation and Open Space Goals:

**Goal 1:** A network of public parks throughout the City that will be convenient and beneficial to all segments of the community.

**Goal 2:** A City that values areas of native vegetation for their open space and biological habitat.

**Goal 3:** Open space areas within private developments that supplement and complement the City's public open spaces.

- Undeveloped private lands, including vacant lots, lands constrained by topography, and sensitive habitats.

As the population continues to grow and the availability of vacant land decreases, the opportunity to meet recreation and open space needs becomes an increasing challenge. In 2012, a Parks Master Plan was prepared to inventory and evaluate all park lands and address future community needs. **Figure RO-1** identifies the current distribution and types of park facilities provided in the community. The City's Parks Master Plan creates a roadmap for upgrades and potential additions to the park system. Reinvestment is needed in park facilities to insure the safety and appeal of the City's recreational amenities. Past examples of this include working with the school districts and adjoining jurisdictions on projects ranging from joint use facilities to Harry Griffen Regional Park.

Included in this network of recreation and open space for La Mesa is land within private developments. Design review procedures and development standards insure that new residential development provides high quality outdoor recreational space within each project.

## Purpose

The California State General Plan Guidelines require an Open Space Element to guide the comprehensive and long-range preservation and conservation of "open space land." This Element also outlines the City's intentions for recreational facilities to improve the quality of life of residents. It is important for the City to maintain a wide range of different types of parks to assure that outdoor recreational opportunities are accessible to everybody.

## Organization and Content

This Element outlines the City's existing park amenities and their classifications. This includes discussion of public opportunities provided by the Community Services Department, as well as private recreational facilities. The Element also covers the City's natural open space amenities.

## Relationship to Other General Plan Elements

Due to the broad scope of this Element, recreation and open space issues overlap those of several Elements. The Land Use and Urban Design Element's issues around natural resources, recreation, enjoyment of scenic beauty, and public grounds are also covered within this Element. The Recreation & Open Space Element relates to the Conservation & Sustainability Element on the managed production of resources and the preservation of natural resources. This Element also overlaps with the Health & Wellness Element and the Safety Element on issues of public health and safety. Shared topic areas are summarized in **Table RO-1**.

Table RO-1. Relationship with other General Plan Elements

Recreation & Open Space Topic Areas	Elements									
	Noise	Land Use & Urban Design	Health and Wellness	Housing	Circulation	Conservation & Sustainability	Historic Preservation	Public Services and Facilities	Safety	
Recreational Facilities		x	x		x	x	x	x	x	
Natural Open Space		x	x		x	x		x		

# GENERAL PLAN

## RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE

### Legend

-  Public Parks
-  Open Space
-  Lakes
-  City of La Mesa
-  Recreational Amenity
  - 1 - Walkway of the Stars
  - 2 - Train Depot
  - 3 - Mt. Nebo Stairs
-  Roads

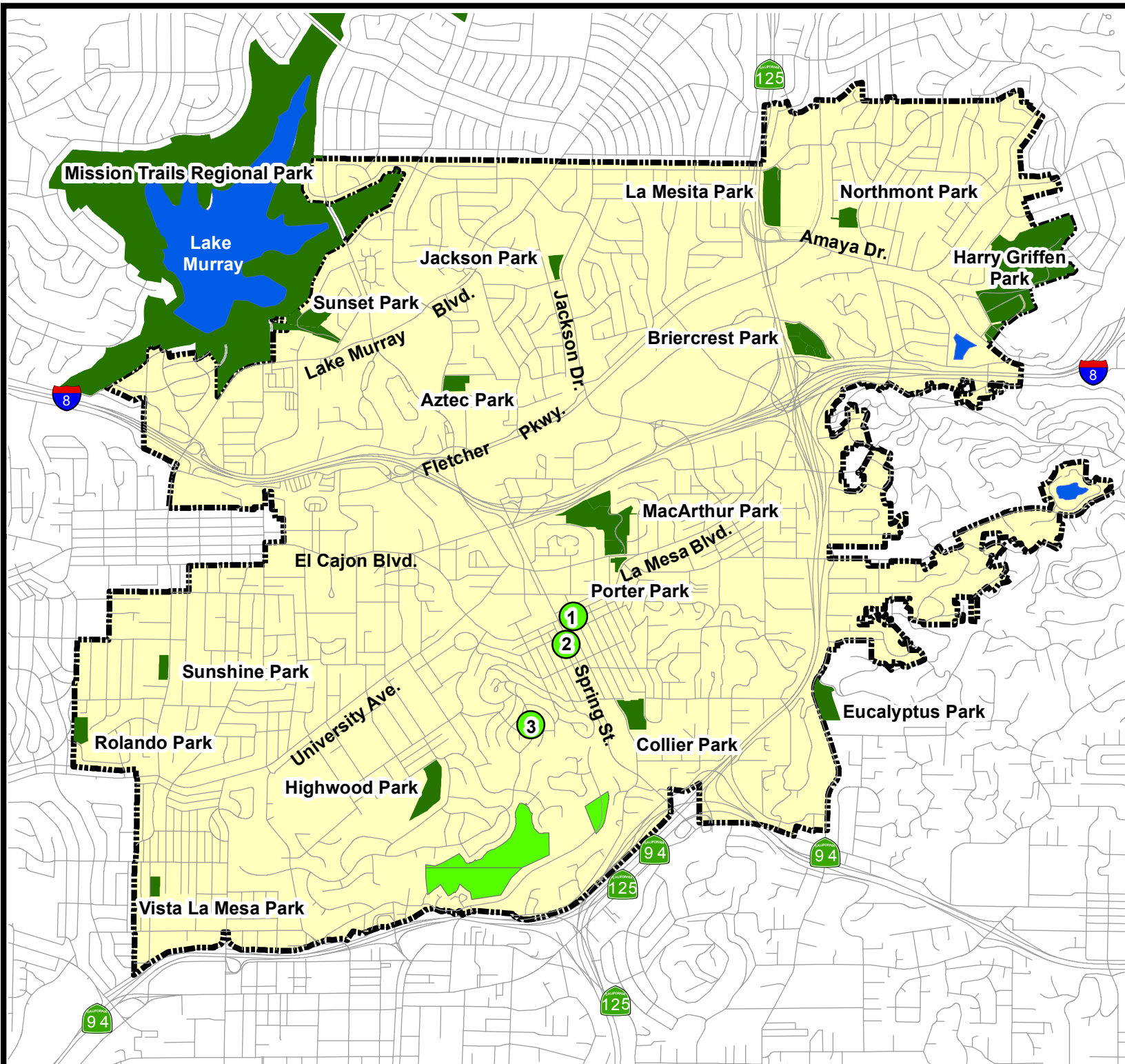


0 1,300 2,600 3,900 Feet



Data Sources:  
SanGIS  
City of La Mesa

Figure RO-1



## Regulatory Setting

The Recreation & Open Space Element fulfills the requirement that cities include an open space element in their general plan documents, defined in Section 65563 of the Government Code. The City of La Mesa has elected to combine the Recreation Element with the Open Space Element based on overlapping concerns regarding public land and open space resource protection. By law, the document must contain an “action program” identifying specific techniques which the City intends to use in implementing its open space plan (Section 65564 of the Government Code). Examples of such “action programs” include provisions for open space in specific plans, and public and private acquisition of open space.

## Recreational Facilities

The City’s park facilities are shown on **Figure RO-1** and are discussed in detail in the City’s Parks Master Plan under separate cover. Linkages to public parks, including sidewalks, crosswalks, and other public access amenities, are important to creating an accessible network of green space within the City.

### Park Classifications

#### *Regional Park*

A Regional park typically serves several communities and has substantially more acreage than parks in individual communities. Regional parks have a variety of recreation facilities and larger scale uses such as golf courses and swimming pools. These parks typically have distinctive scenic, natural, historical, or cultural features that attract users.

Harry Griffen Park is a Regional park operated as part of a Joint Powers Authority composed of Helix Water District, Grossmont Union High School District, the County of San Diego, and the cities of El Cajon and La Mesa. The park is comprised of 53 acres and includes a large amphitheater that is utilized for special events. The park offers individual and group picnicking, onsite parking, a restroom facility, and a children’s play structure. An off-leash dog run is used frequently, as are extensive hiking and walking trails.



The Playground at Harry Griffen Park

### ***Community Park***

Community parks serve a larger population within either a single community area or multiple communities. Both active and passive uses offer recreation opportunities for large groups of people, such as field sports, individual and group picnicking, play areas, and community centers. MacArthur Park is a community park located at the corner of University Avenue and Memorial Drive; it is over 22 acres in size. It includes a municipal pool, Nan Coots Cottage, which is a historic building used for special events, a community center; and a recreation center with basketball courts. A nine hole, par three golf course occupies a majority of the park and includes a driving range and putting and chipping area. Porter Hall is a historic building located at the park's entrance and, as of 2011, was leased to the Foothills Arts Association as an art gallery.

### ***Neighborhood Park***

Neighborhood parks serve a smaller population within an area, but still include both passive and active recreational facilities. These parks include minimum areas for car parking, which encourages visitors to utilize alternative transportation such as biking or walking. Neighborhood parks may include tot lots, picnic facilities, and a multi-use court. Most of the City's parks are classified as neighborhood parks.

Briercrest Park is the latest park to be renovated within the City. It is a sensory park developed to provide seniors and the physically challenged with opportunities to explore and enjoy outdoor recreation and fitness. It includes rolling hills, a rain garden, and non-traditional children's play equipment. Parking is shared with the adjacent Dr. William C. Herrick Community Health Care Library, on Wakarusa Street, which is open to the public. Adjacent to the improved park are vacant parcels owned by the City of La Mesa which maybe leased to private interests for non-park uses.

Sunset Park, adjacent to Lake Murray, provides two ball fields and is the site of the Challenge Center, which provides recreational and rehabilitation opportunities for people living with severe physical disabilities. The Challenge Center building is owned by the City of La Mesa and is leased on a year-to-year basis. Access to this park is granted by the City of San Diego through a right-of-entry permit from Lake Park Drive in La Mesa. Other areas surrounding Lake Murray are discussed later in the Element under "Other Parks."

La Mesita Park is adjacent to the Junior Seau Sports complex and the La Mesa YMCA. It includes open space for informal play, large shade trees, and play equipment. There is a concrete track used by children to ride bicycles. This park includes lighted tennis courts, as well as a skate park for skateboarders and in-line skating. The Junior Seau Sports complex includes full-sized, lighted ball fields and football/soccer fields, available by permit.

Collier Park, located on the east side of Palm Avenue, includes lighted tennis courts, children's play areas, picnic areas, and a restroom facility. The park has been targeted to



receive renovations by the La Mesa Park and Recreation Foundation. In 2011, the City began work on an Environmental Impact Report to consider project alternatives for redevelopment of the Park. Collier Park, and the Spring House within the park site, are registered as local historic landmarks.

Aztec Park, located at the corner of Aztec Drive and Morocco Drive, consists of large, mature shade trees with large expanses of rolling turf areas for informal play. There are also group and individual picnic areas throughout, a restroom building, and a children’s playground. Onsite parking is not available.

### ***Pocket Park***

A pocket park is less than one acre in size, and is primarily made up of hardscape-type plazas and walkways that support a variety of respite and social interaction opportunities. **Figure RO-1** identifies the location of two existing pocket parks. The first is the historic La Mesa Depot Museum located at 4695 Nebo Drive. The Depot structure was constructed in 1894 and the Museum now features historical facts and information from the time when Southern Pacific Railway trains traveled through La Mesa. The second is La Mesa’s “Walkway of the Stars,” a pedestrian walkway that includes decorative art murals and seating areas. The park’s theme honors the City’s outstanding volunteers who have provided 10,000 or more hours of service to the City of La Mesa. “Walkway of the Stars” is located between the Allison Avenue municipal parking lot and La Mesa Boulevard. The walkway was renamed “Walkway of the Stars” in 2003 and features decorative stone stars, embedded in the pavement, with the names of volunteers who have achieved this high standard.

## **Urban Walking Trails**

La Mesa provides recreational programs to keep people active, including several walking programs. Three different urban walking trails respond to different abilities. The “Stroll” is a flat, one-mile beginner route and starts at the La Mesa Railroad Depot. The “Stride” is an intermediate level five-mile route with slight hills which begins at Jackson Park. The “Challenge” begins at Highwood Park and is an advanced level, three and a half miles route with hills and steps. Each route is marked with color coded directional markers so that anyone can follow the walk at anytime.



Plaques mark the City’s urban walking trails.

The La Mesa Art Alliance created a two-mile walk highlighting art throughout the Downtown Village. The route includes elements such as utility boxes that have been transformed by local artists.

## Community Services

The La Mesa Community Services Department offers programs and services to enhance the health and well-being of the community. A wide variety of recreation and leisure classes are available for people of all ages. The Recreation Center at MacArthur Park is the site for classes and activities targeting youth, teens, and younger adults. The Municipal Pool provides aquatic activities and classes for all ages. Community Services also oversees banquet and park facility rentals, and a City-wide volunteer program.



The City offers activities for all ages, including seniors.

### *Adult Enrichment Center*

The La Mesa Adult Enrichment Center strives to promote healthy, active aging through creative and extensive programs. Activities at the La Mesa Adult Enrichment Center (AEC) include a broad range of individual and group services and activities for active mature adults, as well as access to many other community resources and agencies serving senior citizens. This includes educational, recreational, social and cultural events, daily lunch program, day and extended day trips, legal services, information and referral, health screenings, exercise, and dance.

### Private Facilities

The Salvation Army-Kroc Center opened to the public in 2002 and is located west of the City's boundary on University Avenue. This facility is 12.4 acres and includes three pools, sports clubs, a fitness center, a rock climbing wall, basketball courts, an NHL regulation-sized ice rink, and an indoor skate park. The East County Family YMCA is located off of Dallas Street in La Mesa at La Mesita Park. The La Mesa Boys and Girls Club is located on Junior High Drive at Highwood Park and offers a variety of programs serving the City's youth. The Club provides a safe haven for teen-aged youth with after-hours programs focused on personal enrichment through recreational activities. The La Mesa Indoor Soccer Facility is located on Murray Drive, north of the SR-125, and offers opportunities for both youth and adults to participate in community soccer leagues.

### Other Parks

There are several park facilities that benefit La Mesa residents that are not within the City's boundaries. Mission Trails Regional Park is located to the north of the City of La Mesa and includes approximately 5800 acres of natural open space and over 40 miles of hiking trails. It also includes camping at Kumeyaay Lake and a visitor and interpretive center where visitors can explore the cultural, historical, and recreational aspects of the park. The

park includes Lake Murray, located along the City's north-westerly border. Lake Murray provides opportunities for bike riding, jogging, walking, rollerblading, and picnicking with 3.2 miles of shoreline.

Helix Park is located in the Grossmont-Mt. Helix area of unincorporated San Diego County, between the cities of La Mesa and El Cajon. The park is managed and maintained by a non-profit organization called The Mount Helix Foundation.

Eucalyptus County Park is 6.5 acres in size, located at the southeast edge of La Mesa. This park includes facilities such as horseshoe pits, playground, and a pavilion. The park is often used by La Mesa residents.

Hillside Park and Fletcher Hills Park are located within the Fletcher Hills district of the City of El Cajon. Both parks are used by nearby La Mesa residents.

### **Park Development**

The Land Use Map of the Land Use and Urban Design Element identifies the City's designated recreational land. There are 136 acres of parkland distributed over 14 parks. The Parks Master Plan sets a 15 minute walk as a standard for future park development. To achieve this goal, the creation of new pocket- parks, linear parks, and other amenities within the public realm is recommended by the Parks Master Plan. Park development opportunities include:

- Portions of developable sites dedicated for park or active recreational use;
- Inclusion of active recreation internal to these developments;
- Inclusion of plazas, linear parks, or community gardens as part of the development;
- Pursuit of smart growth funds and other grants to support parkland development in association with smart growth, mixed-use, walkable, and transit-supportive projects; and
- Requirement to pay in-lieu park fees that could help acquire land in these park deficient areas.

## Natural Open Space

The 4,200 square miles of the San Diego Region encompasses a variety of habitats, including coastal sage scrub, chaparral, grassland, riparian, woodlands, forest, and desert. The habitats are home to over 200 species that are listed, or proposed for listing, by Federal or State governments as endangered, threatened or rare. The endangered species cover a broad range of flora and fauna, including birds.



Multi-family projects provide onsite open space.

Completed in 1997, the South County Multiple Species Conservation Program targets approximately 172,000 acres for conservation to protect 85 sensitive plants and animals. In northern San Diego County, seven incorporated cities make up the Multiple Habitat Conservation Program (MHCP), which was adopted by the SANDAG Board of Directors in 2003. It protects 77 species within a 20,000-acre preserve system. The remaining unincorporated areas of North and East County cover more than one million acres of land. The County of San Diego is working to set up a habitat preserve that will merge with the other two programs. The Conservation and Sustainability Element contains goals, objectives, and policies for the City to preserve its natural resources.

Because La Mesa is highly urbanized, there are no large areas of undeveloped land. However, Regional open space resources are valuable to the City of La Mesa because they add to the quality of life as outdoor recreational amenities for citizens. Cowles Mountain, Mount Helix and Lake Murray are examples of Regional open space resources outside the City that benefit residents by providing visual enjoyment and recreational opportunities.

The Proposed Land Use Map of the Land Use and Urban Design Element identifies the City's designated open space areas. These include open canyon lands south of the I-8 and a larger open space area within the City's Eastridge neighborhood located to the north of the SR-94.

La Mesa's Open Space Element contains goals and policies concerned with managing all open space areas, including undeveloped lands and outdoor recreation areas. Natural open space areas including canyons and hillsides give form to neighborhoods and add to quality of life as natural amenities.

## Hillside Sites

The La Mesa Zoning Map identifies “environmentally sensitive areas” within the City that require discretionary review of projects to address the site constraints due to areas visible from major public thoroughfares. Sites located south of Alvarado Road in an area characterized by open hillsides and canyons are somewhat visible from Interstate 8 and make up a portion of the visual open space scene along the south face of the corridor. This area is one of the few remaining open canyons located in the northwest quadrant of La Mesa and, due to its visibility and image, it is important that new development be sensitively designed to address constraints.

The challenge is to find the appropriate level of development acceptable on sites which are topographically constrained or designated for open space. In considering a range of alternative designs for hillside properties, the City Council decided in 1989 to allow projects on sites designated open space when approved through the City’s design review process. Site designs that avoid construction of new structures on particularly constrained lands while retaining the natural character as a permanent open visual asset are preferred. Through individual site plan review, the appropriate balance of open space to developable area on individual parcels can be determined. There are areas that are undeveloped, ungraded and consist largely of natural slopes and vegetation which are not expected to significantly change. The policies of the Land Use & Urban Design Element allow for encroachment into natural open space areas subject to meeting certain development standards.



Tungsten Canyon open space preserve

## Goals, Objectives, and Policies

The following section provides guidelines for the future of park and open space development in the City of La Mesa. Although the possibility for expansion of park acreage is limited, La Mesa is committed to maintenance and enhancement of existing park space and the creative and innovative expansion of the City’s recreation resources.

**Goal RO-1: A network of public parks throughout the City that will be convenient and beneficial to all segments of the community.**

***Objective RO-1.1: Give priority to maintaining and improving the City’s public park lands.***

**Policy RO-1.1.1:** Use standards established within the Parks Master Plan for improvements to existing and proposed park facilities.

**Policy RO-1.1.2:** Work collaboratively with school districts and other agencies to develop and share park facilities where feasible.

**Policy RO-1.1.3:** Explore the use of parks for weekend public art exhibits.

**Policy RO-1.1.4:** Continue to collect park in-lieu fees from developers to fund needed park improvements.

**Policy RO-1.1.5:** Promote civic programs and involvement.

***Objective RO-1.2: Improve accessibility to parks.***

**Policy RO-1.2.1:** Situate park and recreation facilities and improve access to these facilities so that no resident is more than a 15 minute walk from an opportunity to engage in a recreational activity.

**Policy RO-1.2.2:** Explore opportunities to add urban walking trails and promote connectivity to public parks.

**Policy RO-1.2.3:** Design and improve parks to accommodate a community varying in age, athletic ability, physical agility, and recreational interest.

**Policy RO-1.2.4:** Ensure park entrances are well marked with signage, well lighted, easily identifiable, and accessible for all ages and physical abilities.

**Goal RO-2: A City that values areas of native vegetation for their open space and biological habitat.**

***Objective RO-2.1: Preserve and restore open space and natural features consistent with the City's Habitat Conservation Plan.***

**Policy RO-2.1.1:** The most sensitive open space and natural lands shall be preserved where feasible and include landscape features that are compatible with adjacent natural vegetation.

**Policy RO-2.1.2:** Consider opportunities to restore open space and natural areas where feasible.

**Policy RO-2.1.3:** Collaborate with the City of San Diego to preserve the Padre Bay Arm of Lake Murray as a park or open space site.

## **Goal RO-3: Open space areas within private developments that supplement and complement the City’s public open spaces.**

### ***Objective RO-3.1: Provide recreational and open space areas in new developments.***

**Policy RO-3.1.1:** Planned residential developments, mixed-use projects, and multiple-family residential projects shall provide usable onsite open space areas as a supplement to the public parks and open space system.

**Policy RO-3.1.2:** Designated open space shall be preserved and maintained on hillsides and slopes, while allowing for limited development of private property.

## **Implementation**

### **Park Development**

The City will actively search for opportunities to acquire and develop new park sites, including a neighborhood park to serve the western portion of La Mesa, as well as new pocket-parks and linear-parks. Park development efforts will be guided by the City’s Parks Master Plan, which discusses details of recreational facilities within reasonable distance to La Mesa’s residents. Policies and actions identified in the Bicycle Facilities and Alternative Transportation Plan focus on improving access to parks, open space and recreational facilities.

### **Park Maintenance**

The City-wide Parks Master Plan provides recommendations for enhancement of existing park properties. The Community Services and Public Works Departments are responsible for ongoing maintenance of the City’s recreation infrastructure. Significant public resources are devoted to combating the vandalism of park amenities on a continuing basis. The Public Works Department maintains park facilities and works with the Police Department to minimize vandalism to City parks.



The Public Works Department is responsible for park maintenance.

### ***Capital Improvements Program***

The City’s Capital Improvements Program is used to identify specific improvements to parks, as well as the source of funding and timeframe for park facility repair and replacement.

### ***Grants and Other Funding***

The City will continue to actively search for potential funding sources for public parks and recreation facilities through grant applications, partnerships, trusts, and specific fundraising events and activities.

### **Natural Open Space**

Development review of private property will preserve natural open space areas such as slopes and hillside sites. The City of La Mesa Urban Design Program contains a section which defines visually sensitive areas. Design guidelines of the program will be used as part of the review of projects for sites that are mapped as visually sensitive areas.

### ***Urban Forestry***

Trees within the public right-of-way and parks contribute to the visual ambiance of the City's neighborhoods and are a consideration when parks are renovated. The Tree Policy Manual is a reference for existing City of La Mesa guidelines, policies, and standards for the planting, care, preservation, maintenance, and replacement of trees. The Development Advisory Board serves as the City Tree Board and reviews and updates the City's Tree Policy Manual as required.

### ***Subarea Habitat Conservation Plan***

There is a privately owned, 50-acre open space preserve within the Eastridge neighborhood, north of High Street and south of Shadow Hill Drive, surrounded by single-family residences and vacant lots. This open space area preserves an area of steep topography and natural vegetation and provides an additional visual amenity. There is a 50-foot wide fire buffer zone along the perimeter of the open space for fire protection purposes. This land is managed and monitored in accordance with the City's Subarea Habitat Conservation Plan in order to preserve a small population of the California gnatcatcher in one of the last natural California coastal sage scrub open space areas in the City of La Mesa.



## Glossary

**Open Space:** Any parcel or area of land or water that is essentially unimproved and devoted to open space use.

**Active Recreation:** A structured individual or team activity that requires the use of special facilities, courses, fields, or equipment.

**Passive Recreation:** Recreational activities that do not require facilities like sports fields or pavilions.

**Regional Park:** A park which attracts visitors throughout the Region, and which typically has distinctive scenic, natural, historical, or cultural features that attract users.

**Community Park:** A park which serves a population within a specific single community area or multiple communities. They include both passive and active recreation facilities, and can include a variety of areas for parking.

**Neighborhood Park:** A park which serves a population within an area but still include both passive and active recreation facilities. They range in size from three to fifteen acres and include minimum areas for parking.

**Pocket Parks:** Parks which typically do not include active recreational activities, are less than one acre in size, and are characterized by plazas and walkways that support a variety of respite and social interaction opportunities. They may include planting, small turf areas, or small children's play areas. These parks are accessible by walking or biking, and may or may not have off-street parking.

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