

VI.

Recreation & Open Space Element



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VI. RECREATION & OPEN SPACE ELEMENT

A. INTRODUCTION

1. Purpose

The Recreation & Open Space Element is intended to guide planning and development for the public park system and open space maintained by the City. It additionally drives the level of service (LOS) standards set for new development in terms of said development's provision of open space and recreation opportunities.

According to the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA), parks and recreation are an essential public service to communities. Not only do they provide well-documented social benefits, but they also provide an economic boost to the community through improving property values and driving indirect revenue with tourism and special events. These spaces also provide community health by encouraging physical activity and environmental benefits through improvement of air quality and protecting natural resources. The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the importance of recreational space to the mental and physical health of individuals, as well as the opportunity for parks to be a safe social gathering space.

2. Definitions

The following is a list of terms and respective definitions that are referenced throughout this element. These terms are adapted from the following sources: Clay County's 10 Year Master Parks & Recreation Plan (2017); Pinellas County Recreation, Open Space, & Culture Element (2007); and Pocket Parks by Alison Blake (2006).

a. Functional Park Classifications

Parks can vary in size and purpose; therefore, there are multiple classifications which help define the facilities available in and around Green Cove Springs.

i. Pocket Park

A small park intended for use by residents in the immediate vicinity but not tied to a specific neighborhood. Activities, amenities, and ancillary facilities such as parking / restrooms may be limited. Pocket parks are scaled-down neighborhood parks, offering space for small neighborhood events, relaxation, lunch breaks, and play.

ii. Neighborhood Park

A park within walking distance of the citizens it serves, providing for close-to-home informal activity and passive recreation. These parks often provide play equipment as well as areas for gathering, walking, and picnicking. They may also contain athletic facilities such as basketball courts. Neighborhood parks are further divided by public and private. Public neighborhood parks cater to nearby citizens, though anyone can access them as well, whereas private neighborhood parks satisfy the recreation needs of a single neighborhood.

iii. Community Park

A park that serves a larger portion of the community and contains a more diverse range of recreational activities as well as unique environmental or aesthetic characteristics. Community parks are considered destinations worth driving to and are ideally located near primary roadways. Community parks can provide a dual function as a neighborhood park for surrounding residents as well. Such



parks may have swimming pools, splash pads, walking trails, play equipment, and other significant features.

iv. Special Facilities

Facilities that are unique in function and purpose qualify as Special Facilities. This would include public golf courses, boat ramps, and activity-tailored gymnasiums. These facilities may be located within a neighborhood or community park, or they could be standalone.

v. Regional Park

Regional parks serve a larger population and make significant natural resources accessible to people of all ages. Generally, these parks exceed 250 acres in size and are within one hour drive-time of a patron's residence. Regional parks may provide for boating, swimming, hiking, picnicking, overnight camping, nature appreciation, and / or a sports complex. Such parks may also be ideal venues for concerts, performances, or other large-scale events.

vi. Nature Reserve Area

Nature Reserve Areas primarily serve to provide outdoor recreation and nature preservation. They may designate viewing stations for the study and appreciation of nature and / or wildlife, as well as hiking and camping facilities, nature centers, or botanical gardens. The recreation function of these areas may be secondary to the preservation function.

b. Recreation Activity Functions

In addition to the above park classifications, one may also classify these resources based on the type of recreation activities they provide.

i. Passive-Based Recreation Activities

Passive-based recreation emphasizes the enjoyment of natural resources rather than participation in an activity, providing for refreshment rather than physical rigor. This may include facilities such as picnic tables, gardens, historical sites, open space, and / or walking trails.

ii. Active-Based Recreation Activities

Active-based recreation emphasizes participation and physical exertion supported by the presence of recreational facilities. These activities are further divided into two categories:

- ◆ **Resource-Based.** Resource-based activities are limited to certain environments. They make use of the natural resources available in the community to provide activities such as water-related activities, hiking trails, or camping.
- ◆ **User-Oriented.** User-oriented activities generally include manmade facilities to provide for activities such as baseball, football, basketball, and more.

c. Other Important Definitions

i. Eco Tourism

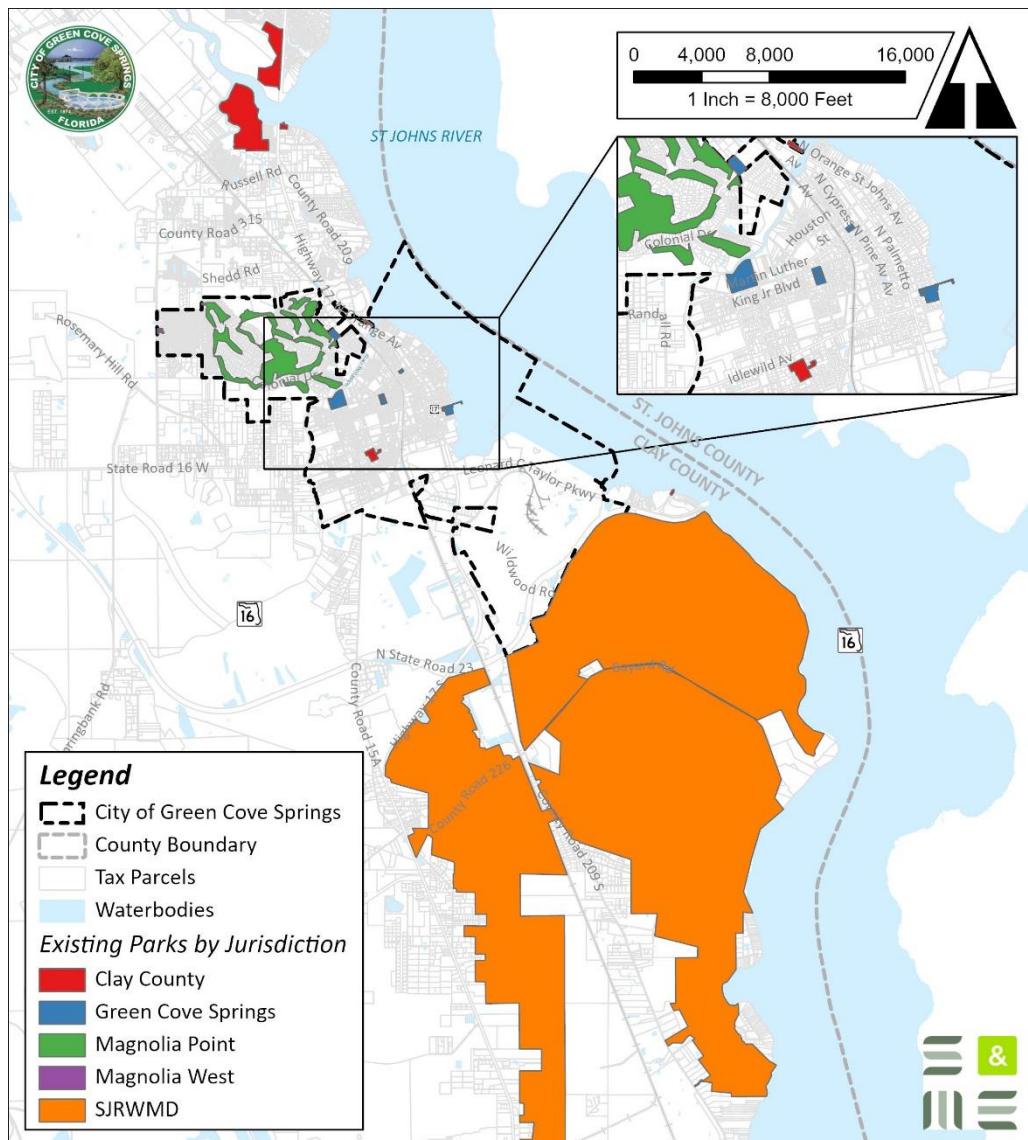
Eco tourism, also known as nature-based tourism, provides informative and/or sustainably participatory experiences in natural or cultural environments, while still supporting the local tourist industry and local economy. This concept balances use of resources with conservation.



B. INVENTORY

Recreational facilities and development are a critical element in the "quality of life" for a community. Recreational needs for all age groups and ability levels require in-depth planning for both active- and passive-based activities. These needs can only be met through the efficient utilization of community recreation areas and a realistic consideration of what programs can be established to ensure future quality recreational opportunities. Understanding the City's existing recreational conditions as well as current proposals for additional facilities is the first step toward planning for the recreational needs of the community.

Map VI-1. Existing Parks by Jurisdiction



Source: City of Green Cove Springs, S&ME, 2021



1. Existing Conditions

Table VI-1. Existing Recreation / Open Space Facilities

Facility	Park Type ¹	Size (acres)	Play apparatus	Basketball	Ball Diamonds	Volleyball	Soccer Fields	Tennis Courts	Pool / Splashpad	Boat Ramp Lanes	Boat Slips	Canoe/Kayak Launch	Fishing / Fishing Pier	Pavilion	Picnic Tables	Benches	Golf Course	Shuffleboard / Horseshoe	Trails (miles)
Owner: City of Green Cove Springs																			
Augusta Savage Arts & Comm. Center	N / SF	5.00	1	1	1		1								1	1			0.19
Augusta Savage Friendship Park	N	1.00	1	1											5	1			
Magnolia Park	N	4.00											1		1				
Spring Park	C	6.00	2			1			1		8	1	1	7	28	37		2	1
Vera Francis Hall Park	N	15.50	1	1	1		1				1	1	3	6	4		1	0.84	
Wildlife Corridor Trail	N	0.3																	0.5
Subtotals		31.53	5	3	2	1	2	0	1	0	8	2	3	10	41	43	0	3	2.53
Owner: Clay County																			
Carl Pugh Park	N / SF	7.00			5										1				
Black Creek Park & Trail	C	15.00												1					8
Camp Chownenwaw Park	C	150.00	1			1			1			1	1	2					
Governors Creek Boat Ramp	C	1.8								2			1		1				
Knight's Boat Ramp	C	4.96								3	34		1		1				
Shands Pier & Boat Ramp	C	0.50							1										
Subtotals		179.26	1	0	5	1	0	0	1	6	34	1	3	4	2	0	0	0	8
Owner: St. Johns River Water Management District																			
Bayard Conservation Area	NRA	10,371												1		2			10.2
Subtotals		10,371	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1		2	0	0	0	10.2
Owner: Private Entity																			
Magnolia Point Golf & Country Club	P	170.00						7	1								1		
Magnolia West Amenity Center	P	2	1						2					2					
Subtotals		172.00	1	0	0	0	0	7	3	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0
Sub Grand Totals		10,754.3	7	3	7	2		7	5	6	42	3	7	16	45	43	1	3	20.73
Owner: Clay County School Board																			
Bannerman Learning Center	S	11.24		4	1													2	
Charles E. Bennett Elem.	S	23.35	1	4															
GCS Junior High	S	28.26		4	2		1												
Subtotals		62.85	1	12	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	
Grand Totals		10,817.3	8	15	10	2	3	7	5	6	42	3	7	16	45	43	1	5	20.73

Source: City of Green Cove Springs, Clay County Parks & Recreation, Clay County School Board, 2021

1. Park Type: N = Neighborhood, C = Community, R = Regional, SF = Special Facility, P = Private, NRA = Nature Reserve Area, S = School

Table VI-1 shows the existing recreation facilities in or near the City of Green Cove Springs. Narratives for these locations are provided on the following pages.



a. Owned / Maintained by City of Green Cove Springs

i. Augusta Savage Arts & Community Center

Augusta Savage Arts & Community Center (ASACC) is located on a 5-acre site bounded by Martin Luther King, Jr., Blvd, Belle Avenue, Forbes Street, and Lemon Street. Augusta Savage donated the property, which was both her home and birth site, for the creation of Dunbar High School, built in 1942 as the first and only black high school in Green Cove Springs. The City began redeveloping the property in 2005 to preserve the historic landmark and encourage its continued operation. The City then acquired the property in 2009. Redevelopment has continued since it began. The site contains user-oriented active-based recreation facilities, including a softball field, soccer field, privately-run mentoring center, privately-run food bank, grilling equipment, and recently renovated playground equipment. The gymnasium, known as the Thomas Hogans Memorial Gym, recently received new basketball court flooring.



Source: City of Green Cove Springs, 2021



Source: City of Green Cove Springs, 2021

ii. Augusta Savage Friendship Park, AKA "Tot Lot"

Augusta Savage Friendship Park, also known as the Tot Lot, is a 1-acre pocket park that is located on Walburg Street, between Pine and Cypress Avenues. This site contains a few large, old trees that help give it character. The park contains user-oriented active-based recreation facilities in the form of play equipment and a basketball court, as well as passive-based recreation elements, including picnic tables and benches. The playground is specifically designed for younger children and families, but the park is open to everyone. New park equipment was installed for the playground in 2019, and in 2021, CARES Act funds supported the installation of a permanent restroom building.



Source: City of Green Cove Springs, 2021



Source: City of Green Cove Springs, 2021

iii. Magnolia Park

Magnolia Park, located at 3585 Harbor Road, is a 4-acre park across from the Magnolia Point entrance. It features passive-based recreation in the form of picnic tables, a walking trail, and a fishing pond.



iv. Spring Park

Spring Park is a 6-acre community park located on the St. Johns River at the end of Spring Street and Walnut Street. Spring Park combines user-oriented and resource-based active-based recreation elements with passive-based recreation activities to create a space welcoming for all. The historic Green Cove spring is located on the park site and provides the water to the 2,700 square foot public swimming pool located at the park. In addition to the swimming pool, this park boasts three pavilions of varying size, three picnic shelters of varying size, a gazebo, recently renovated playground equipment, handicap accessible playground equipment, multiple trails including one along the St. John's River, a StoryWalk maintained by the Clay County Library, a Little Free Library, overlook swings spaced along the river trail, a 500-foot fishing pier with eight overnight docking facilities, a 150-foot dock with a kayak launch, recently upgraded shuffleboard courts, restrooms, flower gardens, historic replica lighting, and a pedestrian bridge over Spring Run that connects two sides of the park near the river. Spring Park also provides wi-fi throughout the entire park and has utilities available in specific areas for use as needed for events. The park has approximately 562 feet along the St. John's River, providing public access to the river. The City considers maintaining and enhancing Spring Park to be key to the redevelopment of the entire downtown area.



Source: City of Green Cove Springs, 2021



Source: City of Green Cove Springs, 2021

v. Vera Francis Hall Park

Vera Francis Hall Park is located off Martin Luther King, Jr., Boulevard, abutting Governors Creek. The park is the site of a closed landfill. The 15.5-acre site contains resource-based and user-oriented elements to form an active-based recreation facility. The park contains playground equipment, restrooms, two picnic pavilions, a canoe launch, a basketball court, a softball field, and a nature trail with a 9 station exercise course. A large pavilion is located at the park that is used as a bandshell. Vera Francis Hall Park also includes wi-fi and has utilities available for use as needed. Development of the park began in 1998 with funds from the Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program



(FRDAP) from the State of Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). The City is in the process of making additional improvements using Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds from the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO). These improvements would include the installation of 13 picnic tables, 6 benches, as well as an additional pavilion.



Source: City of Green Cove Springs, 2021



Source: City of Green Cove Springs, 2021



Source: City of Green Cove Springs, 2021

b. Owned / Maintained by Clay County

i. Carl Pugh Park

Carl Pugh Park is a county-owned 7-acre user-oriented active-based recreation park located south of Idlewild Avenue between Vermont Avenue and West Street. Per Clay County's 10-Year parks & Recreation Master Plan, dated 2017, "recreational opportunity is limited to one softball field and four baseball fields." It previously included two tennis courts, as well, but those were recently removed. The fields have spectator seating; a concession stand, pavilion, and restrooms are located centrally within the park. Carl Pugh Park is leased to the Green Cove Springs Baseball/Softball Association, who host youth baseball, youth (girls) softball, and adult softball.

ii. Black Creek Park and Trail

Black Creek Park and Trail is a 15-acre site that is located on the northwest bank of Black Creek. This is a resource-based active-based recreation park, offering bicycle and pedestrian trails that run along U.S. Highway 17 between Green Cove Springs to the south and Orange Park to the north. The park provides a paved parking area, a pavilion, and a restroom. There is an 8-mile paved path accessible to hikers and cyclists, as well as a mountain bike course.



iii. Camp Chowenwaw Park



Camp Chowenwaw Park is a 150-acre former Girl Scout camp located on the southwest bank of Black Creek, off of Ball Road. The Girl Scout camp originally opened in 1933. The site was purchased by the County in 2006 with the assistance of the Florida Communities Trust using Florida Forever funds. It is now managed to preserve historical and natural resources while promoting recreation. The park offers camping, event facilities, fishing piers, nature trails, kayak access, picnic areas, a volleyball court, a playground, a swimming pool, naturalist-led morning hikes, historical walking tour, museum, nature center, pavilion, and restrooms. With all this, the park fits into all of the activity functional classifications.



Source: claycountygov.com, 2021

iv. Governors Creek Boat Ramp

Governors Creek Boat Ramp is located east of US Highway 17 in Green Cove Springs on the north bank of Governors Creek. This resource-based park is approximately 1.66 acres in size. It contains a boat ramp with two ramp lanes, fishing pier, and covered picnic area, giving it both active and passive elements.



Source: claycountygov.com, 2021

v. Knight's Boat Ramp

Knight's Boat Ramp and Marine Facility is a resource-based park located on the southeast bank of Black Creek, off US Highway 17 north of Green Cove Springs, featuring both active and passive elements. The facility consists of 3 boat ramp lanes, 60 boat trailer parking spaces, a 250' fishing pier, restroom facility, bait shop, fuel sales, vessel pump-out station, four temporary docking slips, and 30 boat slips for rent. A pavilion with a picnic area provides a scenic view of Black Creek and the St. Johns River.



Source: claycountygov.com, 2021

vi. Shands Boat Ramp

Shands Pier and Boat Ramp is a resource-based park located 1.5 miles east of the City limits, off of State Road 16 East, spanning the St. Johns River. The site is 0.5 acres in size. Parking is located on both sides of State Road 16 at the easterly and westerly entrances to the bridge at the grassed areas. The water is very shallow, and it is recommended only smaller boats use the boat ramp. The site

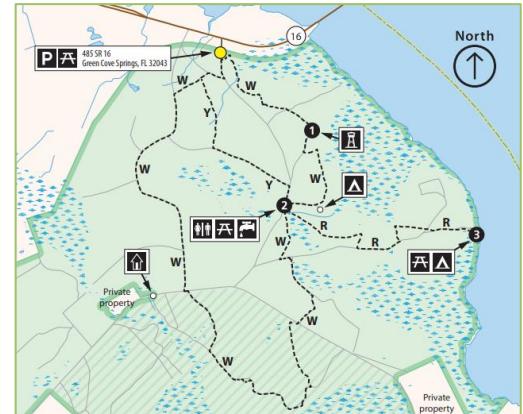


previously included a 1,500-foot fishing pier, but the pier was destroyed in October 2016 by Hurricane Matthew.

c. Owned / Maintained by St. Johns River Water Management District

i. Bayard Conservation Area

Bayard Conservation Area is located off State Road 16 on the St. Johns River just south of Green Cove Springs. This resource-based park contains 10,371 acres that are used for hiking, cycling, hunting, fishing, picnicking, primitive camping, and horseback riding. The area is owned and maintained by the St. Johns River Water Management District. While the site does not have a boat ramp or canoe launch, it is accessible from the St. Johns River. A portion of the property is closed to hunting, thus open year-round for general recreation.



Source: sjrwmd.com, 2021

d. Owned / Maintained by a Private Entity

i. Magnolia Point Golf & Country Club

Magnolia Point Golf and Country Club is a private club located in the Magnolia Point Planned Unit Development (PUD) on 170 acres of land throughout the development. This is a user-oriented active-based recreation area. In addition to the golf course, the Clubhouse contains a pool, tennis courts, and exercise room. Per the Magnolia Point association's website, there are 966 developed lots in the neighborhood. The PUD permits a maximum of 975.

ii. Magnolia West Amenity Center

Magnolia West Amenity Center is a private facility located in Magnolia West at 3490 Canyon Falls Drive on 2 acres of land. The facility serves both Magnolia West and The Preserve at Magnolia West. While development of Magnolia West was delayed by economic downturn, in recent years the original phases (1 & 2) of the community were completed and the development of phases 3 and 4, known as The Preserve, are nearing completion. The facility provides a swimming pool, splash park, community center, two pavilions, and a playground.

e. Owned / Maintained by Clay County School Board

Clay County School Board maintains the following sites, which allowed public use of the recreational facilities until approximately 2018 when safety measures had to take priority and campuses closed to the public.

i. Bannerman Learning Center

Bannerman Learning Center is 11.24 acres, located at 608 Mill Street and contains 4 basketball courts, 1 baseball diamond, and 2 shuffleboard courts.



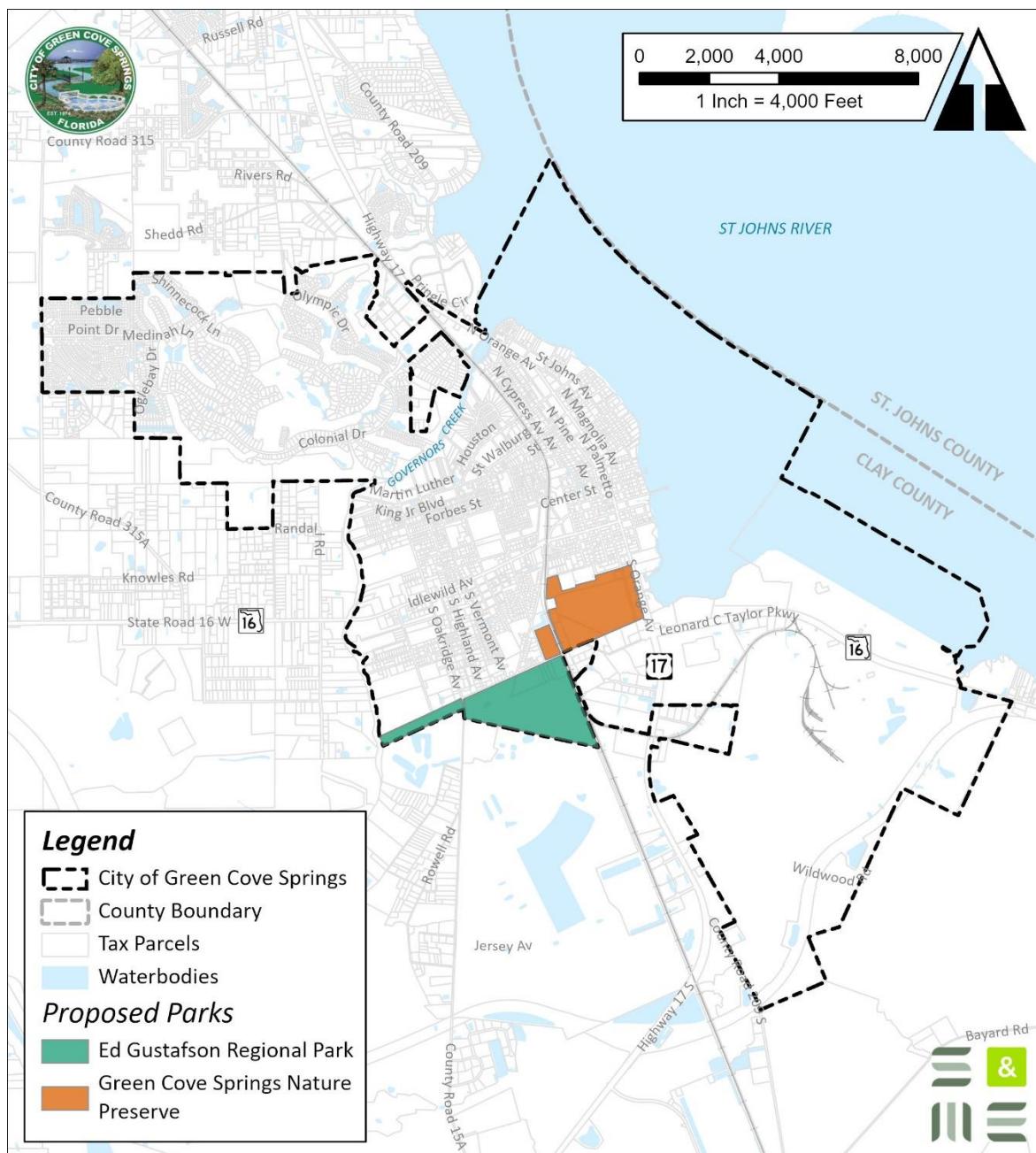
ii. Charles E. Bennett Elementary School

Charles E. Bennett Elementary is 23.35 acres, located at 1 South Oakridge Avenue. The school contains playground equipment and 4 basketball courts.

iii. Green Cove Springs Junior High

Green Cove Springs Junior High is 28.26 acres, located at 1220 Bonaventure Avenue off of Idlewild Avenue between West and Roberts Streets. The school has 4 basketball courts, 1 baseball field, and 1 softball field.

Map VI-2. Proposed Park Spaces



Source: City of Green Cove Springs, S&ME, 2021



2. Planned / Proposed Facilities

Table VI-2. Proposed Recreation / Open Space Facilities

Facility	Park Type ¹	Size (acres)	Play apparatus	Basketball	Ball Diamonds	Volleyball / Soccer	Pool / Splashpad	Boat Ramp Lanes	Boat Slips	Canoe/Kayak Launch	Fishing / Fishing Pier	Picnic Area	Golf Course	Shuffleboard / Horseshoe	Trails
Owner: City of Green Cove Springs															
GCS Nature Preserve	NRA	130.00													7
Ed Gustafson Regional Park	R	136.00		8	6							2			3
Grand Totals		266.00		8	6							2			10

Source: City of Green Cove Springs, 2021

1. NRA = Nature Reserve Area, R= Regional Park

a. City-Owned Proposed Recreation / Open Space Facilities

i. Green Cove Springs Nature Preserve

The City of Green Cove Springs acquired these 130 acres using Florida Communities Trust's Florida Forever Grant program in 2002. The City intends to connect this site to the existing Spring Park, as well as the proposed Ed Gustafson Regional Park, providing passive recreation on-site in the form of an extensive network of trails. This would allow for enjoyment of the land while conserving the natural resource and encourage residents to immerse themselves in nature. The preserve site wetlands comprise primarily Hydric Hammock but additionally feature some Mudflat Marsh, Bottomland Forest, Pine Plantation/Upland Pine Forest, Upland Mixed Forest, Imperiled Seepage Stream, and the Imperiled Floodplain/Riverine Marsh.

Wildlife habitats within the project site include the Hydric Hammock vegetative community, which is suitable as a nesting habitat for the endangered Wood Stork. The Mixed Upland Forest and Bottomland Forest communities support mature pine trees suitable for the threatened Bald Eagle. Other communities support moderate forage habitat for species classified as species of special concern. These include the listed wading birds such as the Little Blue Heron, Reddish Egret, Tricolor Heron, and White Ibis. The Hydric Hammock and Riverine Swamps are used by the American Alligator and the St. Johns River is home to the West Indian Manatee, which can be seen at times feeding near the river's edge.

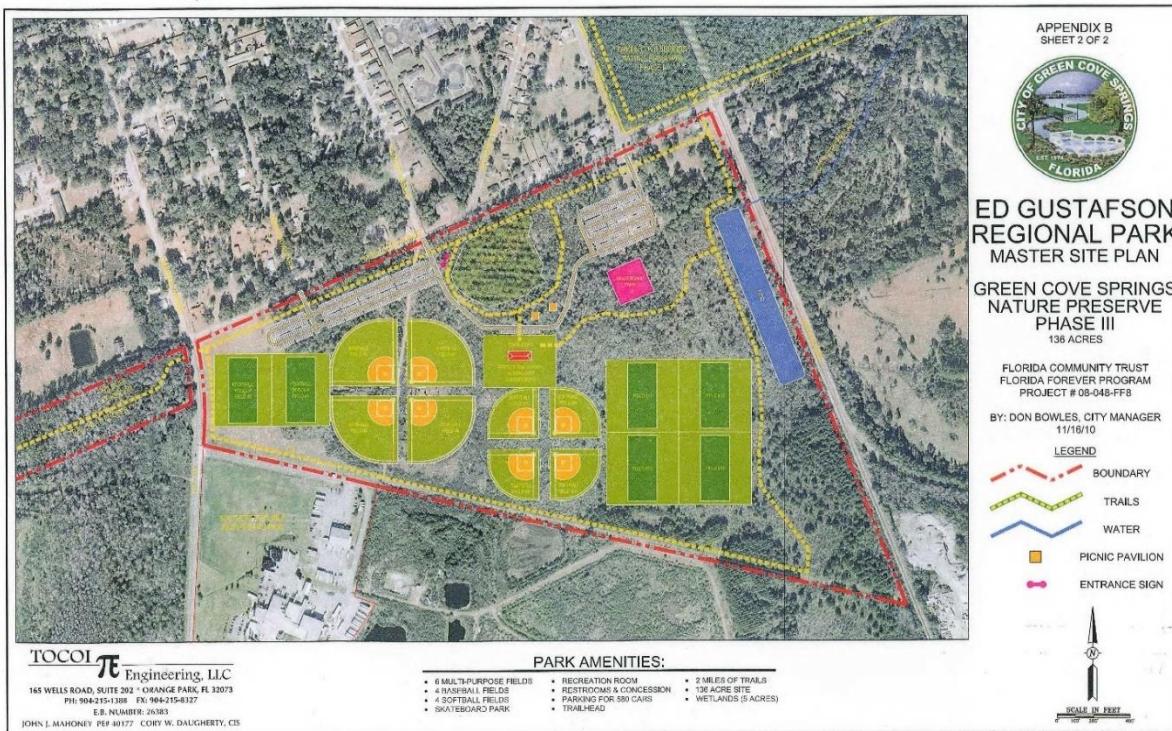
ii. Ed Gustafson Regional Park

In 2005, the City acquired these 136 acres using Florida Communities Trust's Florida Forever Grant program. This park would be connected to the Green Cove Springs Nature Preserve, creating a new wildlife corridor, preserving additional natural resources, and in combination with the above Nature Preserve, create an active recreational regional park. The Ed Gustafson Regional Park would potentially include trails for pedestrians and cyclists (constructed to minimize impact to natural resources),



softball / baseball fields, multi-use fields, a skateboard park, picnic pavilions, and a multi-purpose community center building.

Map VI-3. Ed Gustafson Regional Park Master Site Plan



Source: *City of Green Cove Springs, Tocoi Engineering, 2010*

Due to concerns regarding useability of this site for the intended plans, there has been recent discussion around returning FCT funds used for acquisition of the property and looking to sell the property to a developer, possibly for a private secondary or tertiary education facility.

C. LEVEL OF SERVICE STANDARDS

Most local governments in Florida establish levels of service for parks and recreation based on providing X acres per Y people, wherein these numbers may vary based on community size. Larger local governments, such as counties, often specify standards based on park types as well. These may include facility expectations, such as all neighborhood parks containing play equipment or a certain number of picnic tables.

The Florida State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) 2019 recognizes the growing importance of municipal recreation as emphasis on close-to-home recreation opportunities increases in the public realm. The plan also recognizes that there is no consensus on the best methods for measuring demand for outdoor recreation resources and facilities. This is in part because demand is an economic concept that does not lend itself well to what may be considered a free commodity or service. However, the state has undertaken efforts to measure demand through regular community surveys.

61% of surveyed northeast residents find outdoor recreation in Florida very important to them. Respondents widely indicate their motivations for enjoying outdoor recreation include spending time with friends and family, being active, and being close to nature. Using the results of their statewide survey, SCORP identifies a Demand Index which combines household participation rate and average days of participation. The top three activities



identified as in-demand statewide are fitness walking / jogging, bicycling, and wildlife viewing. Further, the 2019 SCORP shows that demand has increased over time for bicycling; canoeing, kayaking, or standup paddleboarding; geocaching; hiking; nature study; and wildlife viewing. Demand has remained relatively stagnant for athletic activities such as football, basketball, or baseball. The SCORP also identified a gender divide in participation – males are more likely to participate in most measured activities with the exception of picnicking, fitness walking / jogging, and swimming in an outdoor pool – three activities in which females are more likely to participate.

The 2019 SCORP identifies the top five activities for the northeast region as: fitness walking / jogging; wildlife viewing; saltwater beach activities, not including fishing; bicycling; and visiting historical and archaeological sites. Picnicking, hiking, and swimming in outdoor public pools follow behind the top five. These activities are described as "outdoor recreation pull factors [characteristics in an area that might make a person more prone to recreate in that area]" (p 224).

This research provides valuable information for the planning of recreational spaces, ensuring that popular, in-demand activities are provided and aiming to serve the whole community rather than one gender or ethnicity.

1. City of Green Cove Springs Standards

The established Level of Service Standard for the City, currently set forth in the 2025 Comprehensive Plan under Policy 6.3.4 is 5 acres per 1,000 population. The facilities at each park were to be based on the adopted Master Recreation Plan. Presently, there is not an adopted Master Recreation Plan. The City should consider crafting one in order to better plan for recreational development and ensure community needs are being met efficiently and effectively.

As part of past recreation planning efforts, the City has noted a desire to increase eco-tourism and draw in populations beyond the city limits through the development of a regional park. Within Florida, the level of service for parks is typically impacted by day-to-day use by residents as well as seasonal use by tourists. With Green Cove's goal to become a destination while maintaining its small-town charm, it will be important to consider the impact of tourists on the level of service requirements.

a. Required / Actual Facilities Review

Table VI-3. Acres of Parks Versus Population (Public Only – In City Limits)

Park Name	Acreage	Acreage Required
Augusta Savage Arts and Community Center	5	
Augusta Savage Friendship Park	1	
Carl Pugh Park	7	
Magnolia Park	4	
Spring Park	6	
Vera Francis Hall Park	15.5	
Wildlife Corridor Trail	0.3	
Total	38.8	48.93
Difference		-10.13

Source: City of Green Cove Springs, S&ME, 2021

1. 2020 Decennial Census, United States Census Bureau



According to existing City standards, the City *alone* is not meeting the LOS required through the available public park system. The City is short by -10.43 acres (see Table VI-3). As recently as 2019, the City was close to meeting its required acreage based on the known population, 7,923 per the 2019 American Community Survey (ACS), however, the 2020 census found the population to be nearly 2,000 residents larger than anticipated.

Table VI-4. Acres of Park Versus Population (Public / Private – In City Limits)

Park Name	Acreage	Acreage Required
<i>Table VI-3</i>	38.5	48.93
Magnolia Point Golf & Country Club	282.8	
Magnolia West Amenity Center	2	
Total	323.3	48.93
Difference		274.37

Source: *City of Green Cove Springs, S&ME, 2021*

If the private facilities located within city limits are included, however, the City *exceeds* the acreage required (see Table VI-4). While the populations of Magnolia Point and Magnolia West constitute a substantial portion of the City's population, the private facilities are only open to those populations. Meanwhile, those populations have access to all the public facilities, for which reason it would not benefit the City and its residents to include the private facilities in the city-wide LOS review.

One other way to look at the LOS would potentially be to focus on the Core City and the population therein.

Table VI-5. Acres of Parks Versus Population (Census Tract 314 + Public Only)

Park Name	Acreage	Population. ¹	Acreage Required ²
Augusta Savage Arts and Community Center	5	5,955	29.78
Augusta Savage Friendship Park	1		
Carl Pugh Park	7		
Magnolia Park	4		
Spring Park	6		
Vera Francis Hall Park	15.5		
Wildlife Corridor Trail	0.3		
Total	38.8	5,955	29.78
Difference			8.42

Source: *City of Green Cove Springs, S&ME, 2021*

1. *Census Tract 314, 2020 Decennial Census, United States Census Bureau*

2. *Equation: (Population ÷ 1,000) x 5 acres*

As provided in Table VI-5, the Core City, which comprises Census Tract 314, contains approximately 5,955 people. The government-maintained parks operated within city limits are almost all located within the Core City; the only exception is Magnolia Park, located north of the Core City. Altogether, the City *exceeds*



the LOS requirements established in the 2025 Comprehensive Plan and still exceeds them if Magnolia Park is removed from consideration. However, as mentioned above, the residents of Magnolia West and Magnolia Point have access to the public facilities, and it cannot be assumed that they do not use them.

Table VI-3 therefore represents the best review of the level of service in the City based on existing standards.

b. Required / Actual Facilities based on Population Projections

As the population grows through 2045 based on available projections, the recreation space deficit will continue to grow.

To maintain equity throughout the City, additional recreational facilities and open space should be planned and developed to meet the LOS standards with facilities accessible to all community members.

Table VI-6. Acres of Park Versus Population Projections¹

Year	Population	Required Acreage	Difference (Public)
2020	9,786	48.93	-10.13
2025	11,859	59.3	-20.5
2030	14,143	70.72	-31.92
2035	16,297	81.49	-42.69
2040	18,363	91.82	-53.02
2045	18,768	93.84	-55.04

Source: City of Green Cove Springs, University of Florida BEBR, S&ME, 2021

1. Projection data from Table I – 2, Future Land Use Element.

c. Level of Service with Annexed Properties

Given the natural limitation of the City's municipal limits, the City has long been looking to grow through annexation. Specifically, the City has expressed interest in annexing two existing communities: Gator Bay, which contains 62 dwelling units, and St. Johns Landing, which contains 392 multi-family units. Further, the City is currently in the process of annexing land on County Road 15A for the Ayrshire PUD Development, which will include approximately 2,100 dwelling units.

Table VI-7. Population Estimates

Location	DUs	Population ¹
Gator Bay	62	164
St. John's Landing	392	1,039
Ayrshire PUD	2,100	5,565
Annexed Total	2,554	6,768
+ Current Population²		16,554

Source: City of Green Cove Springs, 2021

1. Equation: DUs x 2.65 persons/du | 2019: American Community Survey, United States Census Bureau

2. 2020 Decennial Census, United States Census Bureau



Table VI-8. Acres of Parks Versus Population (with Annexations)

Park Name	Acreage	Acreage Required
Augusta Savage Arts and Community Center	5	$(16,554 / 1,000) * 5 \text{ Acres}$ $=$ 82.77
Augusta Savage Friendship Park	1	
Carl Pugh Park	7	
Magnolia Park	4	
Spring Park	6	
Vera Francis Hall Park	15.5	
Wildlife Corridor Trail	0.3	
Total	38.8	82.77
Difference		-43.97

Source: City of Green Cove Springs, 2021

Table VI-8 illustrates the failure of the City, with existing recreation space, to meet present LOS standards if additional properties are annexed and the Ayrshire PUD is developed.

2. Level of Service (LOS) Standards Generally

In the American Planning Association's (APA) Planning Advisory Service's PAS Memo, Alternative for Determining Parks and Recreation Level of Service (May/June 2016), they provide a list of common Parks and Recreations LOS metrics:

- Acres per capita
- Facilities per capita
- Building square footage per capita (indoor recreation)
- Access distance / time (bike, ped, car, transit)
- Quality of facilities and experience (determines equitable distribution)
- Operating expenditures per acre managed (determines if adequate funding is provided)
- Operating expenditures per capita (determines if adequate funding is provided)
- Revenue per capita (determines if community is recovering enough costs to meet goals)
- Revenue as a percentage of operating loss (determines if community is recovering enough costs to meet goals)

The City currently has an Acres per Capita approach to the recreation LOS.

The City should consider amending the LOS standards to take one or more of the following into account:

- Acres per capita, based on park type (regional, community, neighborhood, pocket).
- Public / Private – Private facilities are not open to the public; therefore, excluding them from the acreage LOS is sensible.
- Facilities per Capita (e.g. number of basketball courts, miles of trails, et cetera).



- Impact of tourism and seasonal residents – seasonal population fluctuations may result in the LOS being met for part of the year but not all of it.

a. FL DEP Facility Recommendations

According to the Florida State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (2013), for which the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) conducted a statewide survey on outdoor recreation activities, shown in Table VI-9. DEP Assessment - Existing State / Region Levels of Service, the City falls short of the existing Levels of Service for the region within which it is located as well as the state.

This will be an important consideration if the City sets a facility per capita LOS or determines each park type must have certain facilities.

Table VI-9. DEP Assessment - Existing State / Region Levels of Service

Activity	Level of Service – Statewide Median ¹	Level of Service – NE Florida ¹	Level of Service – Green Cove Springs ²
Hiking Trails	0.39 miles	0.27 miles	0.23 miles
Picnicking	3 tables	1.81 tables	5.17
Paved Bicycle Trails	0.08 miles	0.05 miles	-
Unpaved Bicycle Trails	0.65 miles	0.63 miles	-
Camping	0.80 sites	0.76 sites	0
Baseball	1.27 fields	1.32 fields	0.88 fields
Basketball	1.23 courts	1.20 courts	0.38 courts
Soccer	0.65 fields	0.71 fields	0.13 fields
Tennis	1.5 courts	0.99 courts	0

Source: City of Green Cove Springs, 2021; Florida State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, 2013

1. Per 1,000 participants; "participants" represents residents and tourists combined.

2. Per 1,000 residents; participant information not available.

Based on the earlier provided information from the 2019 SCORP, it may not be necessary to provide additional athletic facilities in light of the importance of providing bicycle trails and hiking trails.

b. Community Comparison

When looking instead at LOS requirements in other communities, the City of Green Cove Springs does have somewhat similar standards. Table VI-10 shows that other communities have similar acreage requirements, however, many communities also delineate requirements based on park type and include facilities or programs that must be provided. An acreage requirement is a good base from which the City can further develop requirements that support the recreation needs and desires of the community.



Table VI-10. Level of Service Requirements in Other Communities

Location	Topic	Level of Service Requirement
Mount Dora	Access	All residents within 10-minute walk of park
	Park Types	<p>Community Parks must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Be 5 acres or greater. <i>Contain</i> sports fields, cultural / community center with recreational programming, outdoor flex event space, off-street parking, restrooms, picnic pavilions, and a destination playground. <p>Neighborhood Parks must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Be 2 acres or greater. <i>Contain</i> sports courts, a small playground, picnic pavilions, on- or off-street parking, as required for ADA accessibility, and open space.
		Avon Park Capacity 3 acres per 1,000 residents
City of Alachua	Capacity	Minimum of 5 acres of community, neighborhood, or pocket parks per 1,000 persons, with a minimum of 20% of this as improved, passive parks. Recognizes hierarchy of parks (regional, community, neighborhood, pocket)
	Programs	Interpretive centers required in parks with significant cultural, natural, or historical resources
Orange Park	Capacity	3 acres per 1,000 residents
	Park Types "Guidelines"	<p>Equipped Play Area / Tot Lots should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Be in neighborhood, near elementary school when feasible. <i>Serve</i>: 2-3 blocks, up to 2,500 people. Be $\frac{1}{2}$ acre per 1,000 people, minimum acreage of $\frac{1}{4}$ acre or 1 acre depending on location. <i>Contain</i> play apparatus, benches, open space, landscaping, picnic tables optional. <p>Neighborhood Parks should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Be in neighborhood, near elementary school when feasible. <i>Serve</i>: $\frac{1}{4}$ mile to $\frac{1}{2}$ mile, up to 5,000 people. Be 2 acres per 1,000 people, minimum acreage of 2- or 5-acres dependent on location. <i>Contain</i> play apparatus, recreation buildings, sports fields, paved multi-purpose courts, senior citizen area, picnic area, open or free play area, landscaping. <p>Community Parks should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Be designed to serve a group of neighborhoods, adjacent to junior/senior high school when feasible. <i>Serve</i>: $\frac{1}{2}$ mile to 3-mile radius, up to 5,000 people. Be 2 acres per 1,000 people, minimum of 5- or 20-acres dependent on location. <i>Contain</i> all facilities found in a neighborhood park plus facilities to service the entire family. Pools, softball/baseball fields, tennis courts, play areas, passive and recreation buildings.
		City of Venice Capacity 7 acres of functional open space per 1,000-functional population <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Functional population</i> includes full-time residents and seasonal residents. - <i>Functional open space</i> must be open to the public to count to LOS requirements. - <i>Functional open space</i> includes active and passive parks, non-conservation open space, golf courses, sports fields, playgrounds, marina, plazas / courtyards, and other areas that meet the recreational, social, and leisure needs of the community.
City of St. Augustine	Capacity by Park Type	<p>Neighborhood Parks: 0.80 acres per 1,000 people. Community Parks: 1 acre per 1,000 people. Regional Parks: 5 acres per 1,000 people.</p> <p>Uses National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) guidelines to determine type and location of parklands.</p>
Nassau County	Capacity by Park Type	<p>Neighborhood Park – 0.5 miles / 12 minute walk, minimum size of 1 acre.</p> <p>Desirable Characteristics and Facilities: Serve the surrounding neighborhoods with open space and facilities such as basketball courts, children's play equipment and picnic tables.</p> <p>LOS: NONE (intentionally)</p>



Location	Topic	Level of Service Requirement
		<p>Community Park – 1.75 miles / 5 minute drive, minimum size 10 acres. Desirable Characteristics and Facilities: May include areas suited for intense recreation facilities such as athletic complexes and large swimming pools. Easily accessible to nearby neighborhoods.</p> <p>LOS: 3.35 acres per 1,000 residents</p>
		<p>Regional Park – 30 miles / 1 hour drive (County Wide), variable size. Desirable Characteristics and Facilities: Size and location will vary with the primary purpose of the park. May include areas suited for camping, nature and bridle paths, picnicking, fishing, and other resource-based facilities. Boating facilities, beach accesses and similar water-dependent facilities are usually classified as Regional.</p> <p>LOS: 10 acres per 1,000 residents (General), 0.25 acres per 1,000 residents (Beach Access), 0.40 acres per 1,000 residents (Boat Facility)</p>
		<p>Greenway – Variable, 25 – 1500 ft width (minimum size). Desirable Characteristics and Facilities: Emphasize harmony with the natural environment and allow for uninterrupted and safe movement between parks throughout the community for pedestrian bicycles or other low impact transportation modes.</p> <p>LOS: None found.</p>

Source: *City of Green Cove Springs, City of St. Augustine 2040 Comprehensive Plan (2019), Nassau County 2030 Comprehensive Plan Recreation & Open Space Element Background Data & Analysis, Town of Orange Park Comprehensive Plan 2040, City of Avon Park Comprehensive Plan 1990, City of Mount Dora Parks and Recreation Master Plan, City of Alachua Recreation Element (effective July 2020), City of Venice Parks System Master Plan (July 2016).*

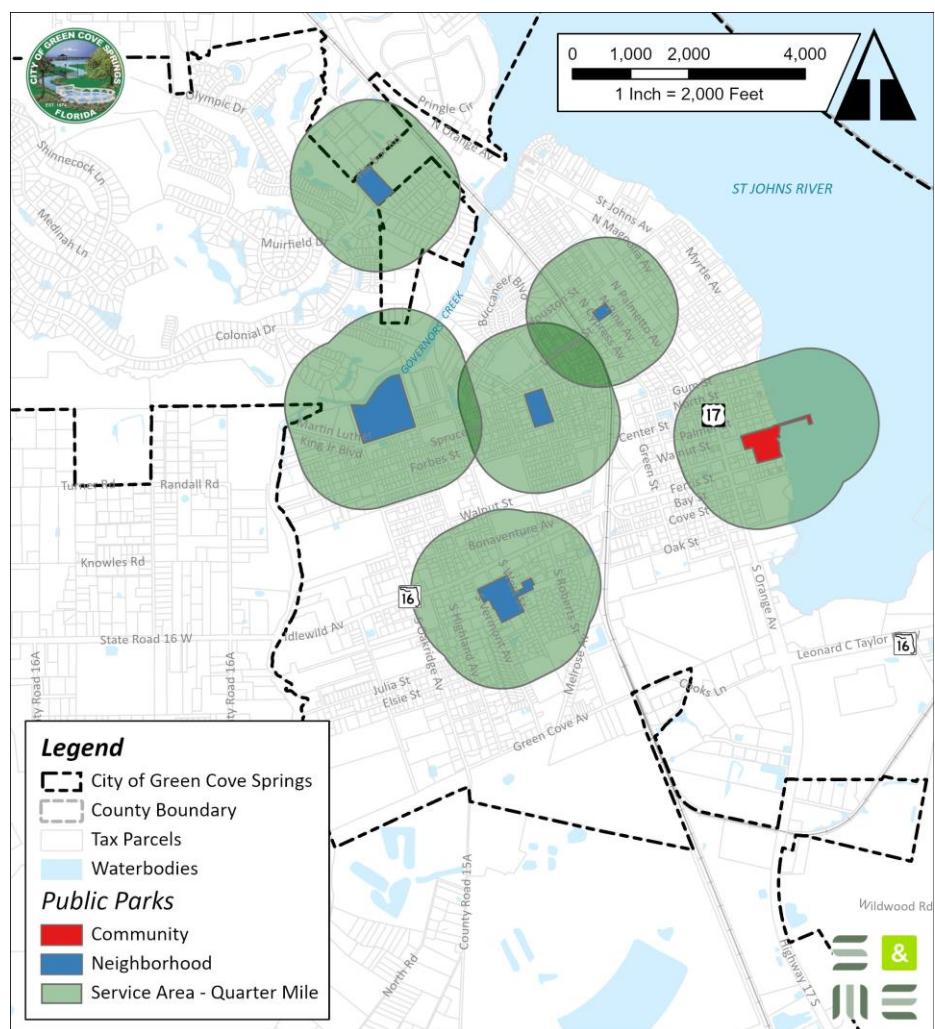


c. Distance from Parks

A generally accepted standard in the planning community is the quarter-mile standard, which specifies residents are willing to walk a quarter-mile to parks or bus stops. Reviewing the City's existing parks through the lens of this standard allows us to see that within the Core City, many homes are within a quarter-mile of a park space. That being said, the facilities available at each park space vary greatly, meaning some parks are more suitable than others for children playing or adults recreating. If a facility LOS were established, it could be used to ensure all park spaces include a play apparatus and/or open space. Map VI-4 shows a quarter-mile buffer around all parks, since all of the parks within the City can be considered Neighborhood Parks. As stated earlier, Community Parks can have the dual role of functioning as a neighborhood park for nearby residents.

Community parks, since they are designed and intended to serve a larger portion of the community and be worth driving to, have a wider service area, set at 1.5 miles. This is shown in Map VI-5, which highlights the substantial coverage of the City by Spring Park alone. The service area for community parks, however, is variable from community to community. Staff selected 1.5 miles as a middle-of-the-road area that felt applicable to our locale since communities tend to establish service zones for their community parks up to 3 miles in area.

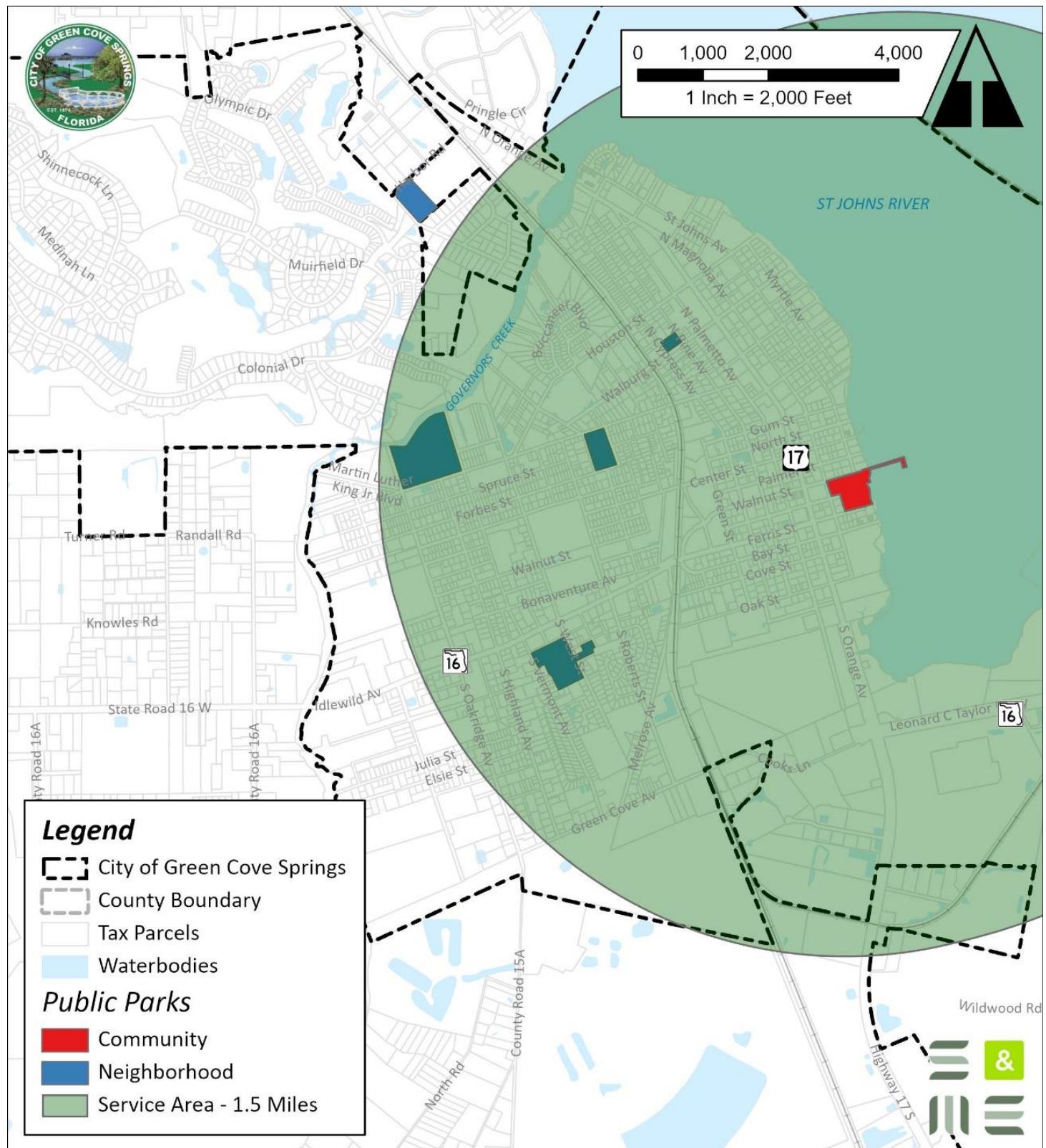
Map VI-4. Service Area for Neighborhood Parks



Source: City of Green Cove Springs, S&ME, 2021



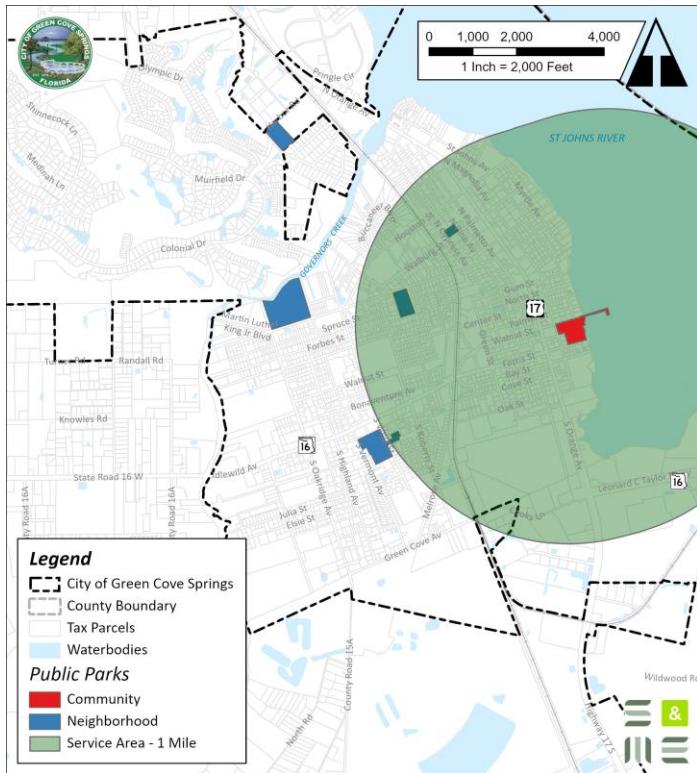
Map VI-5. Distance from Community Parks



Source: City of Green Cove Springs, 2021

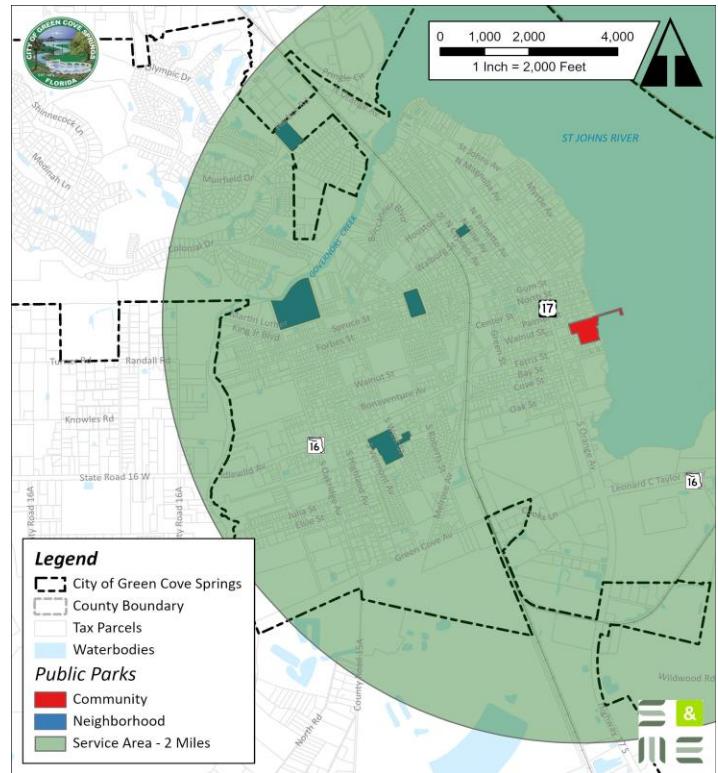


Map VI-7. 1-Mile Service Area



Source: City of Green Cove Springs, S&ME, 2021

Map VI-6. 2-Mile Service Area



Source: City of Green Cove Springs, S&ME, 2021

Given the variability of service areas for community parks, Maps VI-6 and VI-7 show a service area of one mile and two miles respectively. Depending on which service area the City considers best, one may consider the City sufficiently served by the existing number of community parks or one may decide the western, especially the southwestern portion of the City, is underserved by community parks.



D. CONCLUSIONS

The City provides a substantial amount of park space given its size and population, however, additional park space is necessary in order to reach underserved areas and support the current and future population of the City as well as invite economic development and eco-tourism. Ensuring sufficient recreational opportunities are provided can be accomplished through amending the current Level of Service (LOS) requirements and instituting a park dedication fee for new development.

1. Park Types LOS

The LOS requirement, currently 5 acres per 1,000 residents, may be amended to account for park types: Neighborhood Parks and Community Parks especially, but introducing Pocket Parks may also benefit the community and increase accessibility to parks.

a. Pocket Parks

Pocket Parks conceptually provide heaps of flexibility. Three examples (pictured) include a small sculpture garden in Toronto, a small garden in Harlem, and a well landscaped / designed multi-modal path in Tampa. Pocket Parks allow for the creative use of underutilized land. A community garden could serve a dual purpose of pocket park and community activity or learning opportunity.

Pocket Parks may be developed on public or private lands by the local government, by private developers, or by public-private partnership. Community groups sometimes maintain the parks, if not the local government, though most Pocket Parks are designed to be low maintenance. The parks provide additional gathering space, space for brief respite, and can connect portions of the City for increased pedestrian accessibility.

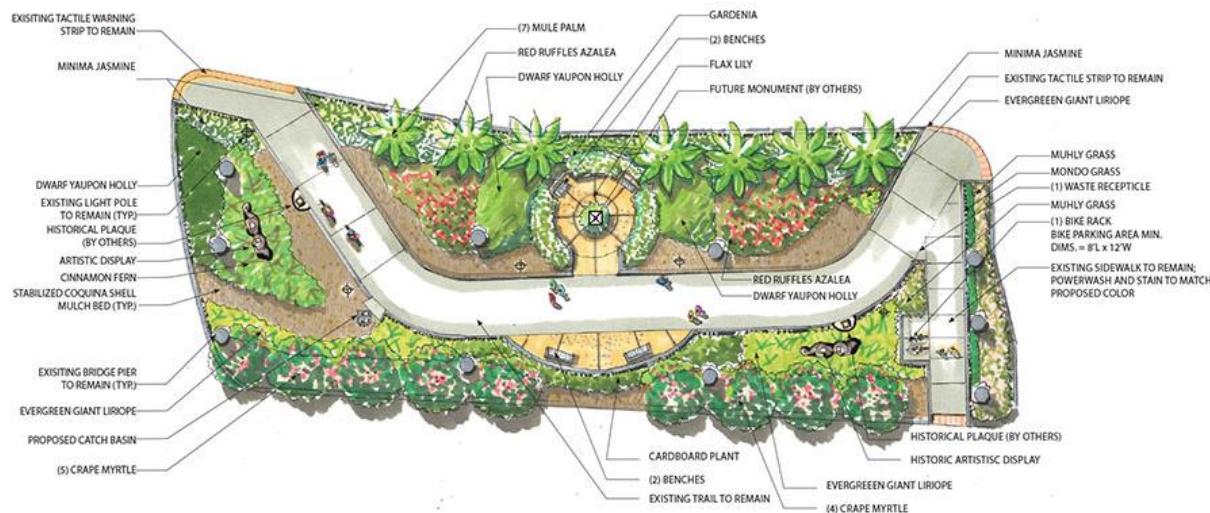


Of the Selmon Greenway Pocket Park (picture follows), Wade Trim says:

"To revitalize parking lot areas under Tampa's elevated Selmon Expressway while connecting two important downtown Tampa commercial districts, Wade Trim designed five pocket parks in underutilized open spaces along the Selmon Greenway. Several innovative design features were used to draw residents to the trail and park system. Colored and textured paving assists with wayfinding and identification of seating and bike parking areas. Landscaping tiers create a multi-dimensional layering of evergreens, shrubs, and groundcover that changes with the seasons. Soil amendments were designed to support low maintenance, water-wise plants. In addition, spaces were designed to deter crime using National Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) standards."



Selman Greenway Pocket Park Design (Tampa)



Source: Wade Trim, 2017

2. Park Distances LOS

Current LOS requirements do not account for the distance between residences and recreation spaces. Establishing distance standards would support the community by ensuring all residences are located within a certain distance of a neighborhood park, such as a quarter-mile, and a certain distance of a community park, such as a mile or mile and a half.

3. Facilities LOS

Current LOS requirements do not account for the distance between residences and specific park facilities, e.g. is there a play apparatus, basketball court, or open field within a certain distance of all residences. They also do not consider whether there is a certain number of these facilities based on the number of residents, as the acreage LOS does.

According to the 2019 American Community Survey, only 6% of housing units in the city have no vehicle, indicating that the majority of residents can access specific facilities if needed by car, however accessibility without a vehicle should not be underrated. Children or teenagers without access to or legal right to drive a car use park facilities, and park use increases when parks (and consequently their facilities) are within a quarter-mile of the end-user.

Setting a facility-based LOS may not be feasible at this time, but if the City establishes a Park Type LOS, it could set facility requirements based on Park Type, such that every neighborhood park will have a play apparatus, an athletic facility, et cetera.

4. Park Dedication Fee

At this time, the City does not have a Park Dedication Fee. Instituting such a fee would enable the City to provide sufficient recreational space for the growing population as new development comes in. Park Dedication Fees are not abnormal in Florida and are calculated in manners similar to water / wastewater improvement trust fund fees.

Alachua County, in 2006, assessed a park dedication fee on all residential development at \$0.126 per square foot of floor area. Pinellas County requires a dedication of park land (which must meet facility requirements)



or a park dedication fee calculated based on a resident population formula. Sunrise, FL adopted a park dedication fee in 1993 that assesses between \$400 and \$1000 per unit based on the number of bedroom in the dwellings.

5. Accessibility

The City should additionally consider accessibility standards for recreational space.

The top six photos below were taken by staff in June 2021 while the bottom two were submitted to the City of Green Cove Springs Interactive Map as part of S&ME's Social Pinpoint Comprehensive Plan community engagement. The available park spaces lack the necessary maintenance or appropriate surface types to be considered internally accessible and many parks do not have sidewalks or crosswalks that lead to them, thus showing preference for vehicular access, though parking is also generally limited. Safe paths to parks should be a standard for the City and could increase recreational activity in the city.

