

CHAPTER 6

CITY OF NORTH PORT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

RECREATION & OPEN SPACE

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RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE ELEMENT

Introduction

The management of City-owned parks, recreational amenities and open space has undergone significant change since the 1997 10-year update of the City of North Port's Comprehensive Plan.

In 1997, the population of North Port was 16,708, by 2008, the City's population had more than tripled to 56,316 (*Bureau of Economic and Business Research estimate*). The City's explosive growth within that period of time is attributable to the large numbers of young families who moved to the City because of its affordable housing and good schools. As a consequence of this continuing trend, the average age of a typical resident has fallen from the 50s to the mid- to late 30s.

Under the terms of the City's 1993 Interlocal Agreement with Sarasota County Government, the City's recreational programs, activities and facilities had been consolidated and placed under the direction of the County. But in June 2006, the two governments, recognizing the changing demographics and the growing recreational needs of the citizens of both the City and County, executed a new Interlocal Agreement that transferred management of a majority of City parks from the County to the City.

Under the 2006 Agreement, management of 11 of the City's recreational facilities now falls to the City of North Port's Division of Parks and Recreation, which was created after the 1997 Comprehensive Plan's adoption. Four parks are managed directly by the County. Three recreational facilities – the Al Goll Community Center, the North Port Swimming Pool and the Youth Recreation Center (otherwise known as the Scout House) – are managed by the local YMCA under a contract with Sarasota County.

Recreational facilities built since the 1997 Comprehensive Plan update include the Narramore Sports Complex, a Skate Park, the George Mullen Activity Center and additional amenities for the City's older parks.

Owned by the Sarasota County School District but partially funded by the City of North Port, the 1,000-plus seat North Port Performing Arts Center on the North Port High School campus opened on November 17, 2001.

First-phase development of the City's next major park, the *Garden of the Five Senses*, was recently completed. The 16-acre park site incorporates native plants that can be appreciated by all of the senses, walking trails and water features. Current plans call for a classroom building and a playground in subsequent phases.

An inventory of North Port parks can be found in **Table 6.1**.

Needs and Priorities

City residents, professional parks and recreation consultants and staff members have identified several needs and priorities that should guide the maintenance, funding and future development of the City of North Port's parks and open space system:

A. 2005 Evaluation and Appraisal Report – The product of an exhaustive public input process, the City of North Port 2005 Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR) endeavored to define the major issues that have emerged with the City's demographic transformation. Among the 13 issues identified in the Report, three dealt specifically with parks and recreation:

- **Funding of Capital Improvements** – Park facilities were listed among capital improvements for which better funding needs to be provided.
- **Parks and Recreation Facilities** – “Throughout this high growth period,” the EAR states, “the City has struggled to provide parks and recreational facilities to meet the demands of a diverse population, which is common in platted lands communities that have reached their high growth phase.”
 - Above all, the EAR Citizen Advisory Committees (CACs) stressed the need to develop and adopt a Parks and Recreation Master Plan, and to provide funding to develop the facilities identified in that Plan. “The Comprehensive Plan,” the committees also stated, “must include language that supports the Parks and Recreation Master Plan...”
 - Along with the growing demand for youth facilities, the CACs emphasized that “the City's parks system must be diversified to meet the needs of the entire community by including passive facilities...and facilities for the non-sports minded youth.”
 - The CACs expressed concern that the City has not aggressively pursued acquisition of land for park facilities.
- **Continuation of the Myakkahatchee Creek Initiative** – Because the Creek is of critical importance to the City as a prime source of potable water and recreational opportunities, the CACs supported the City's continuing effort to acquire the first two tiers of lots along the Creek, thereby creating a linear passive park/greenway and helping to reduce damage from flooding. According to the EAR, policies that support and implement the adopted Myakkahatchee Creek Greenway Master Plan (TGW Engineering, November 2007) need to be added to the City's Comprehensive Plan.

Additional key findings and recommendations in the 2005 EAR include the following:

- As of the EAR's October 2005 publication date, the City's 1997 adopted level-of-service standard of 10 acres of park and open space per 1,000 population was met by North Port's 440 acres of public parklands. Not included in this acreage total are the 8,593 acres that comprise the Myakka State Forest, which lies entirely within the City of North Port, and the Myakka River/Deer Prairie Creek preserve, a portion of which lies inside the City.

- Since 1997, the City has annexed 30 square miles of property. The City has established recreational/open space corridors in these annexations, which are depicted on the amended Future Land Use Map. The “Village” land use classification adopted by the City for these annexed lands requires that each village include significant parkland and open space.
- An interlocal agreement with the Sarasota County School Board for joint use of recreational facilities needs to be pursued more aggressively through strengthening existing policies or adding a new policy.
- Policies protecting historic/archaeological sites need to be strengthened.

B. Parks and Recreation Master Plan – A complete draft of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan (Implementation Proposal/Strategy, Glatting Jackson, December 2006) has been presented in conceptual form to the North Port City Commission. The Commission has not yet adopted the Master Plan, and some of its major conclusions and recommendations are currently being further tested by means of an online public survey conducted by the Parks and Recreation Division.

The Master Plan concluded that the City has insufficient park lands and facilities. Population projections indicate that by 2025, the City will need to acquire 498 acres for additional parks and trails through dedications, partnerships or purchase.

In approximate order of priority, the Master Plan states that the top 10 priorities requiring the City’s attention should be:

- Additional park land
- Youth athletic fields and courts
- Youth / Teen Center and gymnasium
- Improved streets, bike paths, trails and shaded sidewalks
- Dog park
- Nature / environmental facilities and trails
- Canoeing or kayaking launches or trails
- Playgrounds and tot lots
- Swimming pool / aquatics center
- Special events area / outdoor amphitheater

In the immediate term, the conceptual Master Plan offers a five-year Capital Improvements Program for parks which differs somewhat from the City’s own adopted FY 2008-2012 Capital Improvements Program (CIP):

Year	Amount	Description	City CIP Funding
2007	\$2,000,000	Land Acquisition (<i>Phase I</i>)	Myakkahatchee Creek corridor land acquisition and development: \$5,044,475 in FY 06-07; \$1 million in FY 11-12
2008	\$2,000,000	1. Butler Park Renovation 2. Dog Park Development	1. No funds for Butler Park; 2. \$200,000 for dog park in FY 07-08
2009	\$1,500,000	Teen Center Development	\$600,000 in FY 07-08; \$4.2 million in FY 08-09
2010	\$1,000,000	Dallas White Park Renovation	Included in FY 07-08, FY 08-09 and FY 10-11 neighborhood park renovation funds
2011	\$1,050,000	Greenways and Trails Development (<i>Phase I</i>)	Myakkahatchee Creek corridor: \$5,044,475 in FY 06-07; \$1 million in FY 11-12

The Master Plan consultants recommended the following policy initiatives:

- Revise the Comprehensive Plan to integrate the concept of open space as an integral part of neighborhoods.
- Revise the Comprehensive Plan to integrate linear greenways into policies for conservation areas.
- Revise the City’s Land Development Regulations to require the development of neighborhood and community parks in new developments in accordance with the Master Plan.
- Revise the City’s roadway design standards to incorporate sidewalks, bike lanes and street trees on major arterials and collector roads.
- Institute a formalized joint planning process with Sarasota County government and the Sarasota County School Board for the acquisition and development of parks and open space.
- Revise the Comprehensive Plan to adopt the community park service areas proposed in the Master Plan.

Eight varieties of park and park interconnections should figure in the City’s plans, the Parks and Recreation Master Plan consultants recommended:

1. Neighborhood Parks – The conceptual Master Plan’s enthusiastic support for the development of as many as 78 neighborhood parks is currently under debate. The 1997 iteration of the City’s Comprehensive Plan did not advocate the development of new neighborhood parks for cost of development and maintenance reasons. Implementation of such an extensive system of neighborhood parks would be a major policy change with a significant impact on the City’s Capital Improvements Program and annual City budgets.

Some City residents have publicly supported the construction of more neighborhood parks, and the City is employing surveys to determine how deeply this support runs within the community at large. Absent the final results of these surveys, the City’s Parks and Recreation Division currently favors development of a limited number of neighborhood parks (perhaps 10 to 12) as a feasible compromise. In addition, the Division suggests that typical neighborhood park amenities be located in existing and future community parks.

The draft Master Plan suggests that the City might consider locating additional neighborhood parks on former County-owned escheated properties that were transferred to the City by Sarasota County in 2006. Although the Plan addresses only these lots, other similar opportunities to develop neighborhood parks may arise in the future through the escheatment process.

2. Community Parks – The 1997 iteration of the City of North Port’s Comprehensive Plan includes several goals, objectives and policies that illustrate the City’s intention to increase the number of community parks serving the community. As listed in the Parks and Recreation Plan, the existing community parks are:

- Butler Park
- Dallas White Park
- George Mullen Activity Center
- Narramore Sports Complex
- North Port High School / Park
- “Atwater Park” (slated for development beginning in the fourth quarter of 2008)

In addition to these six parks, the Master Plan concludes that 11 more community parks are needed in currently underserved areas of the City. Three or more of these parks could be developed on City-owned land or by joint use of school properties.

There has been a trend to fill up available space in community parks with sports facilities, the Master Plan states. National surveys indicate that people state their greatest need is for open space and natural areas. However, North Port area residents are fortunate in having access to several large open space areas, some of which lie within City boundaries:

- **Myakka State Forest:** Containing 8,593 acres and 2.5 miles of frontage on the State-protected Myakka River, the forest is located entirely within the City;

- **Myakka River State Park**, with 53 square miles (33,920 acres) of wetlands, prairies and woodlands, is one of the State Park System's largest parks; it is within an hour's drive of North Port;
- **Deer Prairie Creek Preserve** (10,128 acres): 1,229 acres of this Southwest Florida Water Management District-managed Preserve lie within City boundaries;
- **Myakkahatchee Creek Greenway** and linear park, a preservation corridor of approximately 670 acres with over seven miles of frontage on the Myakkahatchee Creek;
- **Greenways to be preserved within the West Villages Improvement District and the Northeast Quadrant of the City:** When the City annexed over 30 square miles of property in the 2000-2002 time period, the City established recreation, open space or conservation corridors in which passive recreational opportunities may be permitted.
- **Oscar Scherer State Park**, which contains 1,382 acres of scrubby and pine flatwoods along South Creek in nearby Nokomis, is visited by some 130,000 visitors annually.

3. Regional Parks – A regional park of approximately 100 acres should be developed to alleviate the need for sports facilities. Such a park could be developed jointly by the City and Sarasota County, the Master Plan suggests. About 25 percent of the site should be preserved as open space. The City should seek a location in the northeast quadrant of the City with access to Interstate Highway 75.

4. Special Use Facilities – The Recreation Needs Assessment process used for the development of the Master Plan identified the need for the following special use facilities:

- Family Aquatics Center
- Community / Recreation Center
- Gymnasium
- Senior Center
- Teen Center
- Skate Park
- Remote Control Cars, Boats and Airplane Site

(Historical/Archaeological Sites, while not identified by the Master Plan as Special Use facilities, are high on City government's list of lands to be preserved.)

Overwhelmingly, residents told the consultants that youth and teens do not have adequate facilities to meet their needs.

5. Civic Gathering Space – The City of North Port has no dedicated space for special events and citywide activities. Construction of additional amenities identified in the site plan for the City’s municipal complex (the “*City Center*”) could provide the focal point of the area. It might include development of a mixture of uses incorporating both open space and civic gathering space.

6. Conservation Areas – Conservation areas and passive open spaces surround and thrive within the City of North Port, the Master Plan consultants said. Residents can appreciate the biodiversity of nature by visiting local conservation areas, nature reserves, historic/archaeological areas, parks or land reclamation areas including:

- The Myakka State Forest, which lies entirely within City borders
- The confluence of the Peace and Myakka Rivers near Port Charlotte
- Deer Prairie Creek, a portion of which lies within the City of North Port
- The Carlton Reserve
- Myakka Prairie Tract
- RV Griffin Reserve
- Deep Creek
- Little Salt Spring Park (owned by the University of Miami and located within the City of North Port)

Not mentioned on this list by the consultants was the 160-acre **Myakkahatchee Creek Environmental Park**, a passive park and open space preserve that begins at the City’s northern border. South of the Environmental Park, the City also owns several parcels abutting the Creek. The City intends to create a linear park and greenway consisting of these parcels, the Environmental Park and approximately 160+ additional properties targeted for acquisition. Section E of this Element, a brief summary of the Myakkahatchee Creek Greenway Master Plan, addresses plans for the greenway in greater detail.

7. Bikeways and Trails – The Parks and Recreation Master Plan envisions the creation of a “multi-modal trail system” of bikeways and walking trails. Existing major canal rights-of-way, conservation areas and collector roads would form the backbone of the system, integrated with a connected network of sidewalks and on-street bike lanes. The goals of this system would be to help preserve remaining natural areas, such as streams and canals, and provide alternative transportation and recreational opportunities. The Parks and Recreation Division endorses this concept.

Creation of the network would require the City to continue to incorporate trees and lighting into roadway designs in order to make sidewalks and trails more inviting and user-friendly. The Transportation Element includes a supporting policy statement. Connecting the trails network may also require construction of bridges over waterways and land purchases.

8. Blueways, Creeks and Access Canals – Two natural waterways, the Myakka River and the Myakkahatchee Creek, are of vital importance to the City. The

Master Plan notes that they flow through reserves, preserves and the Myakka State Forest, providing ample recreational opportunities for people to enjoy Florida's rich natural environment. The City is continuing its initiative to create a linear park and greenway along the Myakkahatchee Creek, as evidenced by the \$2.8 million Florida Communities Trust grant awarded in 2007 to expand the Creek corridor. The Master Plan calls this initiative "...critical to the greenways, blueways and trails initiative identified in the [Master Plan] as well as vitally important to protecting the native flora and fauna of the area."

Acknowledging the presence of water control structures on waterways/canals that connect with the Creek, the Master Plan encourages the City to consider acquiring land to allow operators of non-motorized watercraft to portage from one section to another. Drop-in and take-out points could be located in existing and future parks, and environmental education centers could be located at waterfront parks, the Master Plan suggests.

Several City parks abutting the waterway/canal system could provide launch, docking and rest areas for boaters.

The conceptual Master Plan estimates that the total cost of developing all of the facilities identified in the Plan is \$118,000,000. The Plan estimates that grants would reduce the City's portion of the cost to an estimated \$74 million, which might be raised by traditional means such as bonding, ad valorem collections, local option sales taxes and improvement districts. Some cost reductions could be accomplished through potential partnerships with the County and the School Board.

C. Parks and Recreation Division Recommendations – Taking into account a thorough review of the 1997 iteration of the City's Comprehensive Plan, public input, the recommendations of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, the Myakkahatchee Creek Greenway Master Plan and its own internal planning processes, the City's Parks and Recreation Advisory Board considers the following to be priority guidelines for the future of the City's parks and open space system.

1. Land acquisition for new parks – Based on population projections, the conceptual Master Plan concludes that the City will need an additional 498 acres for parks and trails by 2025. Over 50 percent of the 440 acres currently in the City's park system is conservation space not available for development. The Division acknowledges that the City's top priority should be acquisition of land for recreational purposes.

2. Responsiveness to community needs – While acknowledging the importance of establishing population and acreage level of service guidelines for planning purposes, the North Port Parks and Recreation Division believes that North Port should also develop parks and recreational facilities and amenities that reflect the special needs of various constituencies.

3. Neighborhood parks – Surveys conducted by the Parks and Recreation Division and the conceptual Master Plan developers indicate that the majority of respondents favor the development of more neighborhood parks, thus indicating

the need for changing Comprehensive Plan policies. The Division currently favors the mid- to long-term development of 10 to 12 new neighborhood parks.

4. Additional protection for Little Salt Spring – The 1997 iteration of the City of North Port’s Comprehensive Plan included several policies aimed at protecting the Little Salt Spring archaeological site and advocating its development as a public access park.

5. Private developers – The Parks and Recreation Division supports the addition of a Comprehensive Plan policy (*please see Policy 6.3*) that requires private developers to set aside land for public parks and open space as a precondition for development.

6. An interconnected network of parks and open spaces – Bike paths on roadways, pedestrian/bicyclist bridges, sidewalks and canal rights-of-ways should be used to connect parks and open spaces, thereby encouraging residents to use means other than motorized transportation to gain access to recreational amenities.

D. Local Option One Percent Infrastructure Surtax – Sarasota County voters, including North Port residents, voted Nov. 6, 2007, to extend the County-wide local option one percent infrastructure surtax for another 15 years (i.e., from 2010 through 2024). The City of North Port has committed over 25 percent (\$36.8 million) of anticipated surtax revenues to the following parks and open space projects:

1. Land acquisition for future neighborhood and community parks –\$4,600,000

2. Improvements to existing parks – \$2,500,000

3. Recreational, educational and arts facilities for adults – \$1,070,602

4. Myakkahatchee Creek land acquisition and improvements – \$3,300,000: Specifically, surtax revenues would be used to complete the purchase of second-tier properties needed to widen this preservation and recreational corridor, as well as to develop trail heads, watercraft launching areas with shelters, a limited number of playgrounds, an observation deck and other recreational amenities.

5. Regional multi-purpose park – \$14,150,000: The City, in partnership with Sarasota County, proposes to construct a regional park of approximately 100 acres to be located in the northeast quadrant of the City with access to Interstate Highway 75. Athletic facilities, gymnasiums, playgrounds, shelters, concessions stands and an aquatics center are among those proposed for this type of park. Construction of this park is also supported by the conceptual Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

6. Leisure, arts, cultural and historical facilities – \$1,952,718: Proposed facilities would include public monuments and artwork, and interpretive signage and support facilities for historical sites such as the State-registered archaeological site called Little Salt Spring.

7. Land acquisition along greenways, roadways, pathways and waterways – \$1,400,000: One of the conceptual Master Plan’s strongest recommendations is development of an interconnected, pedestrian- and bicyclist-oriented network of connections between parks and open spaces. Land acquisition will be needed in order to implement the network.

8. Improvements for trails and greenways – \$2,150,000: Construction of new hiking and biking trails and associated amenities such as rest areas, shelters, footbridges and observation decks.

9. Construction of amenities for youth-oriented recreational facilities – \$2,150,000: One of the highest-priority needs identified by the public, consultants and the North Port City Commission is construction of youth- and teen-oriented recreational facilities. Foremost among these priorities is the construction of a teen/community center.

10. Water recreation facilities – \$3,150,000: Construction of watercraft launches, docks and ramps for non-motorized access to City canals.

E. Myakkahatchee Creek Greenway Master Plan – A goal of the City for several years, the Myakkahatchee Creek Greenway Concept Plan identifies specific strategies and amenities for the implementation of the City of North Port’s largest and most important recreational amenity, the Myakkahatchee Creek Greenway and preservation corridor. To be established along the Myakkahatchee Creek within City limits, the Greenway lies in the middle of urban development. In many respects, the Greenway occupies a standing in the community similar to that of New York City’s Central Park.

The greenway will provide a multitude of benefits to the citizens of North Port and the State, including:

- Preservation of critical environmental lands and habitats;
- Creation of a linear parkway with the potential for many predominantly passive recreational activities;
- Protection of water quality within the Creek, which is a critical source of water for the City and the immediate local area;
- Minimization of development encroachment into the Creek floodplain;
- Creation of wildlife corridors;
- Educational opportunities for the community; and
- Potential incorporation into the statewide system of Greenways and Trails, per Chapter 260, F.S.

The Myakkahatchee Creek Greenway Concept Plan was presented to the public in January 2007 and the final draft of the Plan was formally adopted by the North Port City Commission in November 2007. Highlights of the Plan include the following:

1. Intensity of recreational uses based on distance from the Creek – Three options for development of the Greenway, ranging from Option A, the most restrictive, to Option C, the least restrictive in terms of allowable activities, are set forth in the Greenway Master Plan. All options recommend the formation of a continuous, uninterrupted corridor on both sides of the Creek north of U.S. Highway 41.

The Greenway Plan described the three options as follows:

- **Option A** affords maximum protection of the waterway. Only passive activities are allowable. These activities include nature trails, handicapped access points and areas, natural scenic areas, canoe and kayak access points and picnic tables.
- **Option B** also affords protection of the waterway and the upland corridor while allowing additional passive activities such as a fitness trail and a fenced paw park.
- **Option C**, the most permissive of the options, allows additional features and activities such as a horse trail, a bicycle trail and a primitive camping area.

The Plan recommends that only those passive activities specified in Option A and Option B be allowed on lands immediately adjacent to the Myakkahatchee Creek. This maximally protected section of the corridor runs from the Myakkahatchee Creek Environmental Park in the north to Appomattox Drive in the south.

More active recreational pursuits like those identified in Option C will only be allowed upland from the creek-front Tier I parcels and roadways, and in no case any closer to the Creek than the Tier II parcels.

2. Master Plan Phasing – As of September 2007, the City owns or has access to 279 parcels out of the 281 parcels fronting on the Creek in Tier I, also identified in the Greenway Plan as Phase 1. The acquisition of 160+ parcels in Tier II will be required in order to allow implementation of Phase 2.

The City is actively engaged in acquiring the remaining Tier I parcels and has embarked on acquisition of Tier II properties. Together, Tiers I and II will provide a continuous, publicly-owned Greenway along the entire waterway north of U.S. Highway 41. The Myakkahatchee Creek Greenway will be implemented in two phases:

Phase 1 – Development of a passive greenway corridor along the waterway which will include low-impact activities such as natural hiking trails; benches; portions of an exercise loop trail; foot bridges; and educational, historic and trail signage. These features will be located along the banks of and in immediate proximity to the Creek corridor.

Phase 2 – Additional activities landward in the Tier II properties will include a bicycle trail, exercise stations, picnic tables and gathering areas.

3. Phase 1 (Tier I) Implementation – The objectives of Phase 1 will be to provide only passive recreational opportunities along the waterway and to improve and expand such opportunities in the Creek-front areas of the existing Environmental,

Butler and Oaks Parks. The Greenway Plan states that the major components of the Tier I portion of the greenway include:

- **Existing Parks** – Parks include the Myakkahatchee Creek Environmental Park, Oaks Park, Butler Park and two proposed new trailhead parks: Greenwood Park and Pan Am Park.
- **Environmental Park improvements** – Many of the existing attributes of both the east and west sides of this Park will be upgraded or expanded.
- **Oaks Park improvements** – Existing features will be upgraded and/or expanded.
- **Butler Park improvements** – Existing features will be improved, and this Park may also be the location of a new Teen Center.

New Trailhead Parks – The Greenway Master Plan proposes two new parks:

- **Greenwood Park**, to be located along the Creek in the vicinity of Greenwood Avenue and North Port Boulevard. The park would function as a trailhead park entrance. Minor amenities would include an information kiosk, bike racks, benches and several picnic tables. Parking would be located at the old City Hall lot.
- **Pan Am Park** would be located along the east side of the Creek near U.S. Highway 41 and Pan American Boulevard. Creation of the park would require the purchase of privately owned land. Pan Am Park would have minor amenities, including an information kiosk, bike racks, benches and several picnic tables, and a trail connecting to Greenwood Park via an existing pedestrian bridge and sidewalk.

Tier I Trails and Trailheads – Approximately 11 miles of trails currently exist on the Tier I properties adjacent to the Myakkahatchee Creek. The Greenway Master Plan states that eight miles of these trails are in poor condition, 2.5 miles are in fair condition, and one-half mile is in good condition. The Plan proposes using the existing trails as part of a looped greenway trail system. Enhancing the existing trail system and adding four more miles of new trails are proposed to complete Phase 1, resulting in a total greenway trail system consisting of 15 miles of looped trails.

Five main trailheads, providing both access and recreational activities, would be part of this trail system. The existing Environmental Park, Oaks Park and Butler Park would provide three of the trailheads. The Greenway Master Plan designates the proposed Greenwood and Pan Am Parks as the fourth and fifth trailheads.

Although the trailhead parks would provide similar services, including parking, restrooms and picnic tables, each would have unique features and activities.

4. Phase 2 (Tier II) Implementation – Phase 2 of the Master Greenway Plan will involve approximately 35 acres of land on both the east and west sides of the Myakkahatchee Creek from just north of Interstate Highway 75 to the Snover Waterway along the Creek. As of the writing of this Element, these properties are

privately owned, and the City intends to continue to negotiate with property owners for amicable purchase. Additionally, the City has received \$2.8 million in grant funding from the Florida Communities Trust Program in order to reduce the cost of acquisition.

More active “Option C” recreational components are intended for Tier II properties, which parallel the more sensitive Tier I properties abutting the Creek. Development and final layout of activities and amenities for Tier II are not yet finalized.

Goals of Tier II property acquisition – Foremost among the reasons for the City’s continued major emphasis on preserving the Myakkahatchee Creek greenway are protection of this regionally significant source of potable water and provision of passive and moderately active recreational opportunities. Additional and related goals include:

- Preserving upland habitat for native plants, trees and animal species, including the protected gopher tortoise and scrub jay;
- Providing connectivity between the greenway and privately and publicly owned property north of the City;
- Encouraging the creation of an additional northern extension of the greenway within the Carlton Preserve to the north;
- Through preservation of these lands in their undeveloped state, preserving floodwater storage capacity and reducing the impacts of seasonal flooding on populated areas.

Proposed Tier II activities and facilities – The Greenway Master Plan lists several activities and recreational amenities that would be appropriate for Tier II:

- A bike path from Interstate Highway 75 to the southern limits of the greenway at the Snover Waterway;
- Playground and picnic pavilion on the west side of the Creek, north of the Snover;
- Picnic area on the east side;
- Butterfly gardens;
- Replanting of disturbed lands with native species;
- Wildlife observation platform;
- Horseshoe pits;
- Educational kiosk and signage;
- Handicapped sidewalk;
- Canoe and kayak access points;
- Nature/hiking trails.

Other recreational opportunities

In addition to public recreational facilities provided by City government, North Port area residents have a rich variety of other recreational opportunities available to them.

A. Golf courses – Within the City limits are three semi-private golf courses:

- **Heron Creek Golf and Country Club** – 27 holes, driving range, fitness center, six tennis courts and a swimming pool;
- **Sabal Trace Golf Club** – 18 holes; and
- **Bobcat Trail Golf and Country Club** – 18 holes, swimming pool, two tennis courts.

B. Fishing and boating – The Myakkahatchee Creek, the Myakka River and the City’s own 84 miles of waterways/canals offer ample opportunity and variety for fishing-minded sportsmen. Marina Park is a favorite spot to fish, as well as to observe manatees in the colder months.

C. Baseball, softball and football - Volunteer-run T-ball, Little League, Girls Softball and Senior League baseball programs are available in North Port. Also very popular with young people are the Pop Warner Football program and a youth soccer program.

D. The North Port Performing Arts Center – The second largest live-performance theater in Sarasota County, the North Port Performing Arts Center has 1,023 seats: 721 seats on the main floor and 302 in the balcony. Located on the campus of North Port High School, it was opened to the public in December 2001. Three amateur performing arts groups make the Performing Arts Center their home venue: the North Port Orchestra, the North Port Chorale and the North Port Concert Band.

Founded in 1949, the Florida West Coast Symphony of Sarasota is the oldest continuing orchestra in the State of Florida. The North Port Performing Arts Center is one of the symphony orchestra’s regular performance venues.

Other performing arts venues in Sarasota County include the Van Wezel Performing Arts Center in Sarasota, Venice Little Theater and Lemon Bay Theatre in Englewood.

E. Warm Mineral Springs – The only privately-owned commercial enterprise of its kind in North Port, Warm Mineral Springs is a resort whose centerpiece is a bathing area in a natural sinkhole. Attracted by the healing properties ascribed to this mineral-laden lake, over 80,000 guests visit the resort annually. Natural thermal heating maintains the lake’s temperature at a constant, year-round temperature of 87 degrees. Massage, water aerobics, acupuncture and other wellness services are offered.

F. Beaches – Sarasota County has some of the most beautiful beaches in the world, many within a 30-to 45-minute drive from North Port:

- **Caspersen Beach (Venice);**
- **North Jetty Park (Venice);**
- **Venice Beach;**

- **Blind Pass Beach (Englewood);**
- **Manasota Beach (Englewood);**
- **Englewood Beach; and**
- **Stump Pass Beach (Englewood).**

G. Open Spaces – The City of North Port owns open spaces of two general types: (1) mowed open spaces in neighborhoods with no recreational facilities and (2) unimproved open spaces for which development plans do not currently exist. These open spaces include, but are not necessarily limited to, the following:

- Open spaces established through annexations;
- Neighborhood open space on Pan American Boulevard; and
- Open space on the New London Waterway.

Open spaces are depicted on the Existing Parks, Future Parks, Recreation Open Space Sites and Conservation Map in this Element.

Table 6.1: North Port Parks Inventory				
Facility/Park	Management/Ownership	Acres	Description/Activity	Park Type
Al Goll Community Center 5930 Sam Shapos Way	County*/City	N/A	*The Center, under the management of the North Port Family YMCA, consists of a fitness center, restrooms, and day care room	Building
Blue Ridge Park 2155 Ridgewood Drive	City	6	Playground, picnic shelter and parking	Neighborhood
Butler Park 6205 W. Price Boulevard	County/City	40	Sports Facility: 1 lighted regulation baseball field, 2 lighted Little League fields, 2 lighted multi-purpose playing fields, 4 batting cages, bike path, 2 picnic shelters, concession/restroom building, playground and swing set.	Community
Dallas White Park 5900 Greenwood Avenue	City	17.87	Adjacent to Goll Center and Pool. Boat ramp with 2 docks, 1 lighted softball field, 2 lighted tennis courts, 2 lighted sand volleyball courts, picnic shelter, restroom, playground equipment.	Community
George Mullen Activity Center 3025 City Center Boulevard	City	180	Offices, 4 meeting rooms, kitchen, gymnasium with stage, restrooms/showers, fitness center, free weights, 2 multi-purpose playing fields (1 lighted).	Community
Highland Ridge Park 6225 Kenwood Drive	City	6.17	2 basketball courts, 1 tennis court, 2 swing sets, 3 shuffleboard courts, 2 racquetball courts, playground and large open space.	Neighborhood
Mt. Hope Park 8161 Lombra Avenue	City	1.1	Small playground and picnic shelter.	Neighborhood
Kirk Park 8305 Trionfo Avenue	City	1.5	1 basketball court, 8 shuffleboard courts, picnic shelter and small playground.	Neighborhood
LaBrea Park 6340 LaBrea Street	City	2.69	1 lighted basketball court, 1 T-ball field, picnic shelter with grill and small playground.	Neighborhood
Marina Park/Boat Ramp 7030 Chancellor Boulevard	County/City	1.04	1 boat ramp, ADA accessible docks (1 floating), small picnic shelters with tables.	Special
McKibben Park 5500 Trekell Street	City	3.51	1 basketball court, 2 tennis courts, 1 shuffleboard court, picnic shelter and playground equipment.	Neighborhood

**Table 6.1: North Port Park Inventory
(continued)**

Facility/Park	Management/Ownership	Acres	Description/Activity	Park Type
Myakkahatchee Environmental Park 6968 Reisterstown Road	County/City	160	Walking trails, canoe/kayak launch, boardwalk, benches, 2 picnic shelters, restrooms and overnight camping.	Special/Nature
Narramore Sports Complex 7860 Glenallen Boulevard	County/City	24.7	3 lighted softball fields, concession building and restrooms, 3 lighted soccer fields and concessions stand.	Community
Swimming Pool 5900 Greenwood Avenue	County*/City	N/A	*Pool under the management of the North Port YMCA. 2 offices, pump room, guardroom, 25 yd. pool with diving board, lockers and restrooms.	Special
Oaks Park Mandrake Avenue	City	11.36	No facilities; provides access to Myakkahatchee Creek.	TBD
Pine Park 4556 McKibben Drive	City	1.22	1 picnic table, small tot lot playground.	Neighborhood
North Port Skate Park 5651 North Port Boulevard	City	0.85	Beginner and advanced courses with ramps, jumps and rails, restrooms and office, 2 small picnic shelters.	Special
Youth Recreation Center 5845 Greenwood Avenue	County*/City	N/A	Known as the Scout House. Multi-purpose room with small stage area, kitchen and restrooms. Currently under the management of the North Port YMCA	Building
<i>New parks either under construction or soon to be constructed</i>				
Garden of the Five Senses Pan American Boulevard	City	16.1	Passive park currently being constructed: Extensive landscaping, interpretive signs, classroom, water features, walking paths.	Special
“Atwater Street” Community Park (Yet to be formally named; slated construction start in 4th quarter of 2008)	County/City	25	Four Little League fields, one regulation-size baseball field, walking/jogging trail, playground, splash playground, picnic facilities and open space.	Community

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