



OPEN SPACE, PARKS, RECREATION, AND WELLNESS



Open Space, Parks, Recreation, and Wellness

No single park, no matter how large and how well designed, would provide citizens with the beneficial influences of nature; instead parks need to be linked to one another and to surrounding residential neighborhoods.

~Frederick Law Olmsted

Full-service parks and recreation systems encourage outdoor exercise, participation in athletic and other wellness programs, and foster community gatherings. Beyond leisure activities, these open spaces and gathering spaces improve the quality of life for Maryland Heights’ residents, enhance community character, attract economic development, and can serve environmental functions such as flood control and habitat protection. For residents, employees, and visitors to Maryland Heights, the enhancement of its parks system and conservation of green spaces will continue to enhance the City’s vibrancy. It should also be noted that open spaces are more broadly defined than parks. They include uses such as conservation areas, habitat preservation, golf courses, subdivision common ground, wetlands, and stormwater areas. Vacant land that is in private ownership, while perceived by some as “open new requests and initiatives are considered in light of existing commitments.

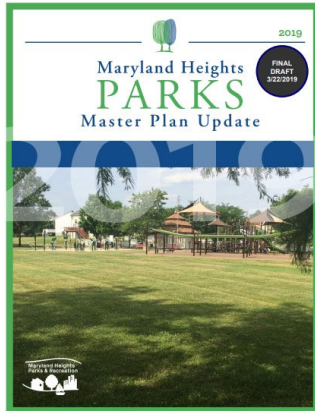
The City’s recreation facilities are some of the best in the state. Many have won

- Aquaport Family Aquatic Center
- Centene Community Ice Center
- Dogport at McKelvey Woods Nature Park
- Eise Neighborhood Park
- Maryland Heights Community Center
- McKelvey Woods Nature Park
- McKelvey Woods Trail
- Parkwood Park
- Quiet Hollow Park
- Sportport Athletic Complex
- Vago Community Park





Open Space, Parks, Recreation, and Wellness



“Click” Image for
Hyperlink to Plan.

The City’s Department of Parks and Recreation creates and maintains its own master plan, last updated in 2019. The purpose of the master plan is to develop a community-supported plan that provides guidance for future development and redevelopment of the City’s parks, recreation programming, open space, trails, and facilities. The plan guides policy development, prioritizes demands and opportunities, and generates a strategic action plan to be updated every three years. Moreover, it creates of a clear set of goals, policies, and objectives thus providing direction to City staff, the Parks and Recreation Committee and the City Council. Implementation measures include short-term, mid-term, and long-term goals.

The intent of this chapter of the Comprehensive Plan is to support and encourage the goals, objectives, and policies of the Parks Master Plan, particularly when making land use decisions. While the Parks Master Plan pertains to City owned and operated parks, these policies should also be implemented within private developments to the greatest extent practical. The top three priorities identified as most important to the community in 2019 were:

- 1. Expand trails and improve connectivity.**
- 2. Provide natural areas for passive recreation and wildlife.**
- 3. Promote physical activity and wellness.**

Furthermore, the community identified the following park amenities as being most important:

- 1. Paved Trails**
- 2. Nature Trails**
- 3. Natural areas for passive recreation & wildlife benefit**
- 4. Playgrounds**
- 5. Picnic Shelters**
- 6. Restrooms**



GOAL: ENCOURAGE AND REQUIRE OPEN SPACE THAT IS BOTH ACCESSIBLE AND SUSTAINABLE, AND THAT RESULTS IN A QUALITY PLACE.

OBJECTIVES:

- *Create adaptable, multiuse spaces for community gathering, play, and social activity for all ages and abilities.*
- *Ensure compatibility between potential development and the existing natural environment.*
- *Support the integration of open space to create transitions in mixed-use developments and residential neighborhoods.*
- *Ensure the accessibility of recreational facilities.*
- *Ensure the character and image of the City of Maryland Heights is perpetuated in open space and recreational areas.*

ACTIONS

The following actions may be undertaken to implement the objectives of this goal:

- ⇒ Incentivize the planting of native species while managing invasive plant species.
- ⇒ Upgrade existing recreational facilities to be accessible to the extent feasible.
- ⇒ Research public and open space design standards for possible inclusion in City regulations.
- ⇒ Coordinate development proposals with the City's public art policy.
- ⇒ Encourage interactive gathering places and public art.



GOAL: ENCOURAGE AND REQUIRE OPEN SPACE THAT IS BOTH ACCESSIBLE AND SUSTAINABLE, AND THAT RESULTS IN A QUALITY PLACE.

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Parks and open spaces enhance the quality of life in Maryland Heights by:

- ◆ Enhancing neighborhoods by providing places to socialize, play, exercise, or simply relax.
- ◆ Promoting a healthy lifestyle by providing connections to bikeways, walkways, and trail systems.
- ◆ Contributing to biodiversity and animal habitats, particularly when designed and planted with native plants while managing invasive plant species.
- ◆ Providing buffers between developments or providing relief between parking lots, streets, and other urban features.
- ◆ Mitigating the impacts of development, such as stormwater runoff.

Objective: Create adaptable, multiuse spaces for community gathering, play, and social activity for all ages and abilities.

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Providing quality recreational opportunities begins with proper planning. To assure adequacy and maximum usability, recreation areas and facilities should be developed with regard for the needs of the people and the area they serve. Proper planning should also take into consideration a number of factors, including but not limited to, location of existing recreational areas (for example, proximity to the area served, separation from incompatible land uses), adequacy of existing facilities, site planning for the location of future facilities, access to current and future facilities, provisions for recreation programs, and financing, maintenance and management of existing and proposed parks, trails and recreational facilities.

Opportunities for community gathering should be provided within private developments, particularly residential ones, to the greatest extent practical. While the City, County, and State provide larger scale opportunities, smaller, closer-to-home facilities are essential. These can be something as extravagant as a neighborhood playground within common ground or as simple as a landscaped area with seating.





Objective: Ensure compatibility between potential development and the existing natural environment.

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An integral part of land use planning is attempting to ensure newly planned land uses are not incompatible with, or even detrimental to, existing land uses. This is particularly true with protecting the natural environment, parks, and open space. New development could have substantial impacts on the quality and quantity of a community’s air, land, water, and biological resources and those impacts must be considered and appropriately mitigated as warranted. The review process should include an acknowledgement of the existing natural environment so that development decisions reflect the range of community values.

Objective: Support the integration of open space to create transitions in mixed-use developments and residential neighborhoods.

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Well-planned open space integrated into mixed-use developments and residential neighborhoods can be used to buffer and screen less compatible uses and features, serve an important function such as stormwater management, provide a space for gatherings and events, foster a sense of place, and improve the overall health and wellness of residents. Common ground and stormwater areas have historically been afterthoughts in the development process, spaces unusable for development and devoid of character or accessibility. Such areas must be carefully planned, designed, and located to serve as amenities for residents and visitors or purposeful preservation of natural resources.

Besides following existing open space, landscaping, and tree preservation regulations, new development in Maryland Heights should attempt to integrate into the existing park and trail network, as feasible.





Objective: Ensure the accessibility of recreational facilities.

Use of the Maryland Heights' parks and recreational facilities by residents and visitors is important for relaxation and health benefits. Where feasible, the City should continue to increase the accessibility of its parks and recreational facilities for all ages and physical abilities. New facilities and development must also comply with all applicable American's with Disabilities Act laws and policies.



Objective: Ensure the character and image of the City of Maryland Heights is perpetuated in open space and recreational areas.

As a relatively new City, Maryland Heights has struggled to establish a definitive sense of character and place. For instance, Creve Coeur Lake Memorial Park is located in Maryland Heights, but many visitors are unaware that the park is located in Maryland Heights. The City should take every opportunity to bring awareness to the fact that Creve Coeur Lake Memorial Park is located within Maryland Heights, whether it be through gateway signage, marketing, or an alternative. Well-designed open space and recreational facilities can provide gathering places that improve the character of a development, neighborhood, or community. Places like parks, plazas, gazebos, shelters, and entry features can become places where residents and visitors interact, but also create a greater sense of community and a clear awareness that they are in Maryland Heights.





GOAL: ENCOURAGE WELLNESS AND ACTIVE LIVING THROUGH GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE, PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, AND RECREATION.

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OBJECTIVES:

- ***Support the creation of pedestrian linkages for existing development, redevelopment, and infill.***
- ***Enhance, reinforce, and connect to local and regional open space and recreation facilities.***
- ***Encourage walkable developments and neighborhoods.***

ACTIONS

The following actions may be undertaken to implement the objectives of this goal:

- ⇒ Prepare a green infrastructure study that considers stormwater management, conservation easements, current zoning, and public/private partnerships.
- ⇒ Develop and maintain a map of existing and future sidewalks, paths, trails, and bicycle routes within the City, and identify linkages into the regional system.
- ⇒ Require that developments include interconnected functional open space and pedestrian/bicycle linkages.
- ⇒ Add sidewalks and bicycle lanes to connect gaps between existing facilities.
- ⇒ Identify future connections to the regional parks and trails system.
- ⇒ Support the I-70 Eastbound Blanchette Bicycle and Pedestrian Crossing, linking it to the local and regional trail system.



GOAL: ENCOURAGE WELLNESS AND ACTIVE LIVING THROUGH GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE, PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, AND RECREATION.

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The design of the built environment can encourage or discourage the wellness of its residents. For example, community design focused on the automobile tends to discourage walking as a means of transportation or pleasure while design focused on the pedestrian facilitates it. Policies and community design that foster more active forms of transportation and daily living can combat rising obesity rates as well as problems related to pollution, environmental degradation, and energy consumption.

WHAT IS GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE?

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines green infrastructure as:

“... a cost-effective, resilient approach to managing wet weather impacts that provides many community benefits. While single-purpose gray stormwater infrastructure - conventional piped drainage and water treatment systems - is designed to move urban stormwater away from the built environment, green infrastructure reduces and treats stormwater at its source while delivering environmental, social, and economic benefits.”

Images Source:
EPA, 2021





WHAT IS GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE?

Stormwater runoff is a major cause of water pollution in urban areas. When rain falls on roofs, streets, and parking lots the water cannot soak into the ground as it should because of the hard surfaces. Stormwater then drains through gutters, storm sewers, and other engineered collection systems and is discharged into nearby water bodies. The runoff can carry trash, bacteria, heavy metals, and other pollutants from the impermeable surfaces. Higher flows resulting from heavy rains also can cause erosion and flooding in streams, damaging habitat, property, and infrastructure.

In contrast, when rain falls in natural, undeveloped areas, the water is absorbed and filtered by soil and plants. Stormwater runoff becomes cleaner and less of a problem. Green infrastructure uses vegetation, soils, and other elements and practices to mimic some of the natural processes required to manage water and create healthier urban environments. At the city or county scale, green infrastructure can be a patchwork of natural areas that provides habitat, flood protection, cleaner air, and cleaner water. At the neighborhood or site scale, stormwater management systems that mimic nature soak up and store water in the immediate area. The key principles to achieve a connected system of green infrastructure include protecting existing public open space and natural areas, connecting large blocks of natural areas with corridors, and mimicking natural processes where development does occur.

Images Source:
EPA, 2021



Urban Rain Garden



Permeable Pavement



Tree Canopy



Objective: Support the creation of pedestrian linkages for existing development, redevelopment, and infill.

Objective: Enhance, reinforce, and connect to local and regional open space and recreation facilities.

It is crucial for new or infill developments to provide linkages from sidewalks or trails within the project to adjoining sidewalks and/or the regional trail system. On a large scale, this practice prevents isolated, stand-alone projects or neighborhoods and on a small scale it provides pedestrians a travel route into and through the site without having to walk in drive lanes meant for vehicles.



Open space linkages are corridors that connect open space features such as parks, trails, and natural resources. Linkages can consist of trails, sidewalks, streets, and stream corridors. They provide a physical connection between people and open space resources. Open space linkages can connect neighborhoods with other regional parks and serve as safe and accessible routes for people of all abilities. They can allow movement from place to place without having to confront auto and truck traffic. They also allow wildlife to move from one isolated natural area to another. Identifying opportunities to develop regional open space linkages is important for Maryland Heights to connect to the larger regional parks system.

The following organizations are actively working to expand the regional parks, trails, and open space system in the St. Louis metropolitan area:

- **Great Rivers Greenway**
- **St. Louis County Department of Parks and Recreation**
- **Bike St. Louis**
- **Trailnet**
- **St. Louis Open Space Council**



Objective: Encourage walkable developments and neighborhoods.

Recent studies¹ have shown that homebuyers want neighborhoods with a sense of community, an abundance of civic amenities, convenient access to goods and services, and a connection to nature. They prefer walkable, attractive neighborhoods with desirable public and private spaces that are compact, yet livable, with a safe, quiet, and peaceful atmosphere.

The concept of walkability is defined in many ways. It is often referred to it as a mixture of physical and perceptual elements that make an area conducive to walking. This definition emphasizes the dual elements of walkability:

- Physical elements - walkways, adjacent uses
- Perceived elements - safety, comfort, enjoyment

A 2015 Harvard University Study defined walkability in the following:

In professional, research, and public debates the term is used to refer to several quite different kinds of phenomena. Some discussions focus on environmental features or means of making walkable environments, including areas being traversable, compact, physically-enticing, and safe. Others deal with outcomes potentially fostered by such environments, such as making places lively, enhancing sustainable transportation options, and inducing exercise. Finally some use the term walkability as a proxy for better design whether composed of multiple, measurable dimensions or providing a holistic solution to urban problems.²

From an economic perspective, it can be defined as the degree to which an area within walking distance of a property encourages walking trips to destinations that satisfy most everyday needs. This would include school, work, shopping, and recreation.

Despite the variety of ways in which walkability is defined, there is consensus on the important characteristics that make a neighborhood walkable. These characteristics are:

- A discernable center or focal point (i.e. town center, main street, plaza)
- Compact development
- Mixed use and mixed income
- Public spaces
- Pedestrian centered design
- Access to jobs, goods, services, and opportunities for social interaction

Besides economic benefits, walkable neighborhoods promote health, encourage community, and improve property values.

¹ [Brookings Report \(2012\), "Walk this Way: The Economic Promise of Walkable Places in Metropolitan Washington, D.C."](#).

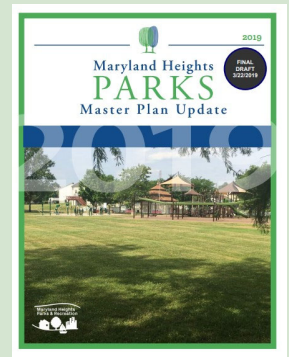
² [A. Forsyth. \(2015\) "What is a Walkable Place? The Walkability Debate in Urban Design". Urban Design International 20, 4: 274-292.](#)



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Maryland Height Parks Master Plan (2019)

https://www.marylandheights.com/Document_Center/Department/Parks%20&%20Recreation/MH_ParksMasterPlan_2019.pdf



Environmental Protection Agency, (2020) "What is Green Infrastructure?"

<https://www.epa.gov/green-infrastructure/what-green-infrastructure>

