

CHAPTER SIX - PARKS PLAN

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The Parks Plan is an element of the Parks, Open Space, Trails and Recreation Master Plan. Its purpose is to describe the vision, structure, policies, priorities and actions that are required by the City of Durango to expand and improve its parks system throughout the community over the coming decade.

One of the goals of this Plan is to define the major elements and programmatic objectives for the parks system. To accomplish this, the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the 2001 City of Durango Parks, Open Space and Trails Master Plan have been utilized as the foundation for the new Parks Plan. This Plan suggests ways in which the 2001 Parks Master Plan can be built upon, expanded, modernized and more thoroughly articulated in order to give Durango the additional tools necessary to effectively expand and care for its park system. Overall recommendations for parks are reiterated in the recommendations and implementation section at the end of the Plan.

Key recommendations of the 2001 Parks Master Plan have been implemented as follows:

1. *Begin immediately to locate and plan one or more major sports field facilities in community or regional parks.* The City has worked successfully with the Three Springs development to earmark 75 acres for the future development of a sports field complex to include five multi-use fields, three softball fields and eight tennis courts. Additionally, the City continues to work with Fort Lewis College to provide additional multi-use fields on the campus and make improvements to the existing softball complex.
2. *Refurbish and make selective improvements to several parks.* The City has continued to improve the parks system by updating playground equipment, upgrading fall-zone safety surfaces and improving accessibility for people with disabilities. The maintenance efficiency and aesthetics of the parks system has also improved.
3. *Implement the Animas River Greenway.* The Animas River Greenway has been enhanced by the preservation of additional natural lands, bank stabilization and invasive species removal, park and trail development projects, and improvements at the whitewater course. In 2007, the City received a conditional recreational water right or specifically a Recreational In-Channel Diversion (RICD) water right at Whitewater Park to protect future boating opportunities on the Animas River.
4. *Monitor the use of City recreation facilities.* The City continues to monitor the high level of use of recreational facilities by area residents and visitors to the region. In addition to providing a long term (99 year) lease for the development of the Durango Community Recreation Center at the La Plata County Fairgrounds, La Plata County continues to partner with the City of Durango with the provision of scholarships to needy families.

5. *Adopt a level-of-service methodology for parks planning.* The City has utilized the adopted Parks Master Plan to require developers to dedicate and fund the construction of park and trail improvements in new developments.

City parks and recreation facilities have continued to expand with the increasing demands of the community. **Figures 12-13** provides an overview of the existing parks and recreation facilities in Durango.

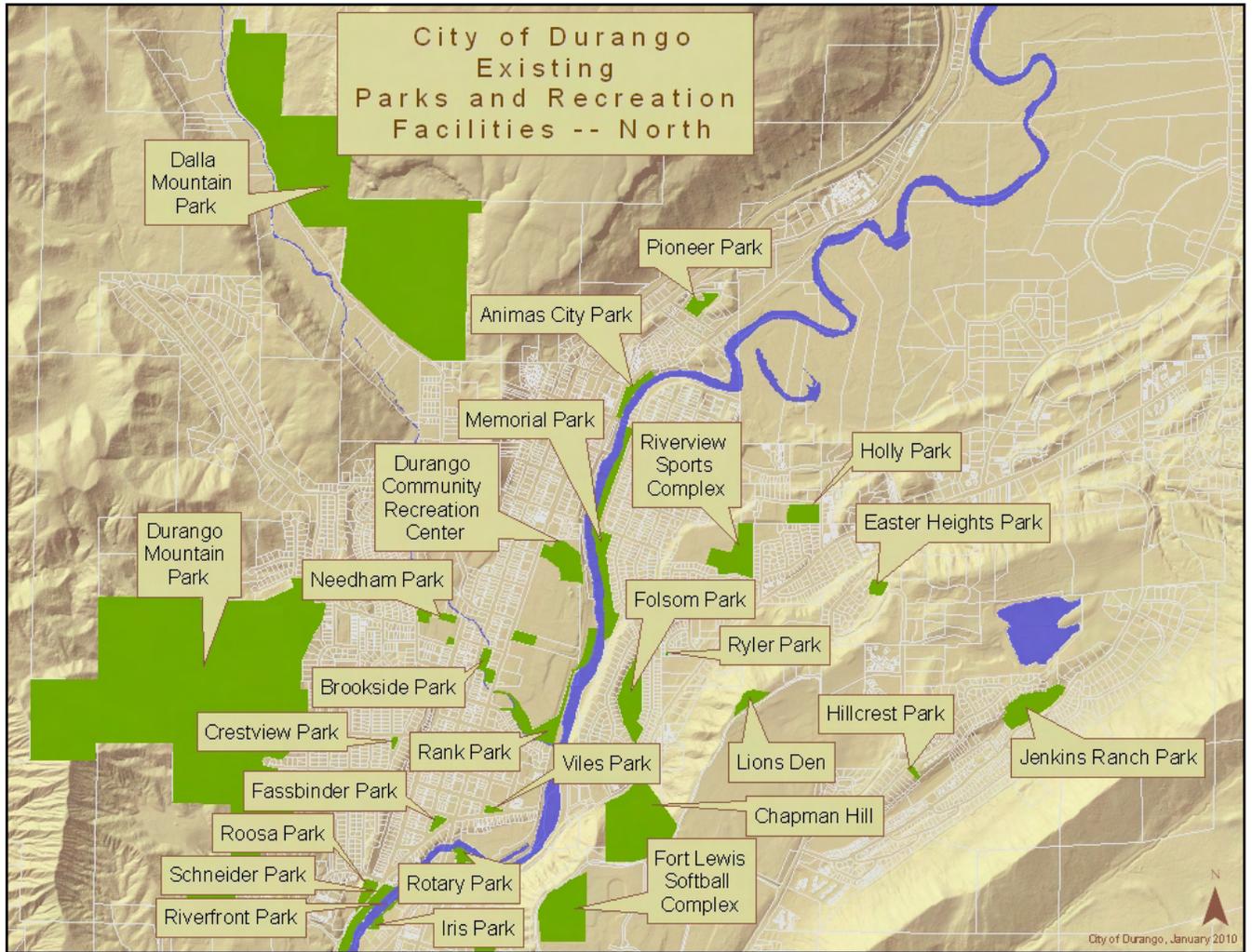


Figure 12 - Existing Parks and Recreation Facilities (NORTH)



Figure 13 - Existing Parks and Recreation Facilities (SOUTH)

6.2 PARKS AND FACILITIES ARE WELL MAINTAINED

In October 2008, the PROS Team performed an assessment of the sites and facilities within the Durango Parks and Recreation Department System (“System”) including, but not limited to parks, trails, structures, and the Recreation Center. These assessments establish an accurate understanding and ‘snapshot’ of the existing conditions of sites and facilities within the System, and support the foundation, or reference point, from which specific strategies and recommendations will be framed in Master Plan recommendations section of the Plan. The contents of the *Site and Facility Assessment* are a basic description of existing conditions, known constraints, observed best practices, and areas for improvement. There are four (4) key findings that are detailed below:

1. Parks and Facilities are Generally Well Maintained
2. Insufficient Labor and Budget Resources
3. Usage Demands Outpace Available Facility Supply
4. Durango Excels at Park Connectivity

On-site assessments of 43 parks and facilities demonstrated that all assets are well maintained by the City of Durango. The conditions and climate in which the parks and facilities are located contribute to heightened maintenance requirements, including seasonal demands in both the winter and the summer. Examples of increased seasonal requirements in the summer include irrigation, mowing, external and internal structural repair, minor construction projects, increased outdoor use impacts (i.e. litter, vandalism), and graffiti. Examples of increased seasonal requirements in the winter include extensive snow removal responsibilities throughout the City, internal building repair, incidental external structural repairs, and increased indoor use impacts (i.e. building maintenance, vandalism). In addition to seasonal requirements, heavy demand is placed on the parks as, according to the household survey, 88% of residents used parks or trails during the last year.

It was clearly observed that the maintenance staff of the Durango Parks and Recreation Department is very productive in maintaining the sites and structures of the City’s park system. This observation comes from inspection of the parks as well as from the household survey in which approximately 90% of residents rated the physical condition of parks and trails as excellent or good. While there are not adequate financial resources consistently available to attend to numerous site and facility needs, the maintenance staff performs well with the resources they are given to work with. This is further outlined in the Maintenance Management Plan, included in **Appendix D**. Specific operations and management of open space and trails is included within the Open Space and Trails sections of the Master Plan.

There are select examples of sites and facilities that have areas of needed maintenance improvement, but most of these are circumstantial and are caused by either a lack of sufficient labor and budget resources to sufficiently address the issues, or by design and/or environmental conditions beyond the control of the Department. The most prominent example of the latter is the 33rd Street/East Third Avenue river access site on the north end of the City. This site is heavily used in the non-winter months for river access for both private and commercial boaters. The design and environmental conditions of the site

exacerbate the impacts that have led to the deteriorated road shoulders and parking area, and contribute to excessive congestion that is problematic for area residents.

6.3 INSUFFICIENT LABOR AND BUDGET RESOURCES

There are insufficient labor and budget resources available to the Department to address the growing site and facility needs of the System. This finding is rooted in the observation that, while the Department is innovative in its use of seasonal labor and contracted services to meet fluctuating site and facility needs, the increased demands from aging facilities and growth of the community are already outpacing the resources available to the Department. It is particularly evident that the growth occurring east and southeast of the City will place significant demand on the existing maintenance capabilities of the Department that are beyond current means.

It is common that communities are eagerly supportive of expansion of parks and recreation assets, but are not quick enough to stay ahead of the increased maintenance demands that come with this growth. As a result, parks and recreation agencies frequently evolve to managing their relationships with community leadership and policy makers from a defensive position. This circumstance largely stems from a perception of poor performance as observed in deteriorated facilities and site conditions. Typically, these issues emerge from limited resource allocations for asset maintenance over time and grow to where they require substantial policy action and/or potential voter approval to address. One of the intended outcomes of the Parks, Open Space, Trails, and Recreation Master Plan is to provide realistic strategies and sound recommendations to avoid this issue in the City of Durango.

6.4 USAGE DEMANDS OUTPACE AVAILABLE FACILITY SUPPLY

The residents of the City of Durango are avid users of the sports fields located throughout the community on City Parks, School District lands, and on the fields of Fort Lewis College. In performing both the site and facility assessments, as well as initial public input sessions, it is evident that there are not sufficient outdoor sports fields to meet the needs of the community. Certain facilities are being “loved to death” and have become maintenance challenges to keep them in good working condition. Another specific example is the limited capacity of select spaces in the recreation center to meet the demand from the community including, but not limited to the exercise gym, storage, and facility maintenance space. A third example includes the limited river access sites that are well below the demand from private and commercial paddlers to put-in and take-out of the Animas River.

Beyond these examples, there are additional facility needs that are outlined more specifically in other sections of the Master Plan. Inadequate facility supply includes circumstances where less than optimal use of facilities was observed or maintenance requirements were increased as a result of facility conditions and heavy usage.