

COUNTY OF SAN MATEO
Parks Department



DATE: March 26, 2014

COMMISSION MEETING DATE: April 3, 2014

TO: Parks and Recreation Commission

FROM: Marlene Finley, Parks Director

SUBJECT: San Mateo County Parks
Mini or Pocket Parks: Is It time?

RECOMMENDATION:

Review and approve recommended actions as listed on page 6 of this report.

DISCUSSION:

Over the last several months, San Mateo County Parks Department has opened one new playground, Friendship Park, and acquired one new neighborhood park, Moss Beach Park. These two events, coupled with requests for playgrounds from other communities, raise the question: Is it time for San Mateo County to embrace neighborhood parks in its mission?

Definitions, goals, objectives and guidelines for parks are found in the San Mateo County General Management Plan (1986), Mid-Coast Action Plan for Parks and Recreation (2007) and the San Mateo County Parks Strategic Plan (2013). The purpose of this paper is to provide a summary of the current status of terminology, and characteristics of parks by classification, and highlight existing County policy. This information can be used to inform a discussion on the need to update language and possibly policy within the County Parks system.

The following are some common definitions currently in use:

Definitions (as adapted from National Recreation and Parks Association standards):

Mini Parks (i.e., pocket parks) are small (< 1 acre), specialized facilities that serve a concentrated population or specific group such as tots or senior citizens. They are usually located within neighborhoods and in close proximity to apartment complexes or other densely populated areas.

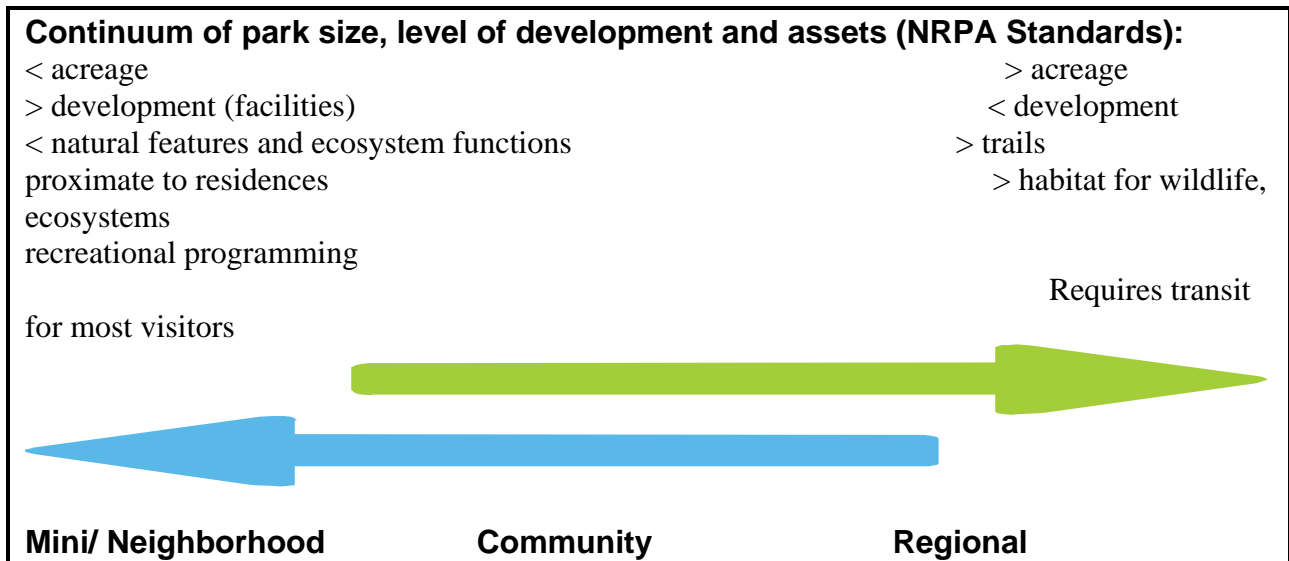
Neighborhood Parks are typically small parks in residential or mixed commercial and residential areas which are within walking distance. They are often designed and used for intense, active recreational activities such as ball fields, playgrounds and developed picnic areas.

Community Parks are a mix of developed structures, ball fields, playgrounds and may include natural features. As opposed to Neighborhood Parks which serve the needs of a single neighborhood, Community Parks serve several neighborhoods and are usually over 25 acres in size. They are typically maintained by a city, county or Special District.

Regional Parks usually comprise large acreage (often over 200 acres), are predominantly natural areas with trails and sometimes feature lakes. In general, 80% of a regional park consists of conservation and natural resource management acreage while 20% or less is developed for active recreation. These parks are typically provided by counties, regional parks jurisdiction, open space or water Special Districts. In some cases regional parks may be provided as national or state recreation areas.

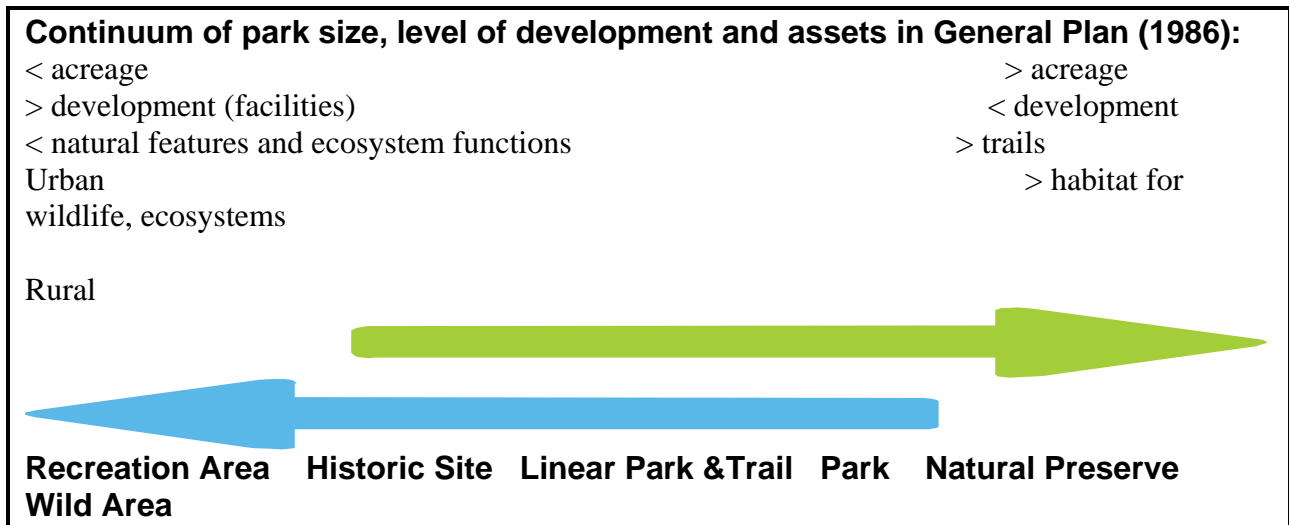
Linear Parks are developed for one or more modes of travel such as walking, bicycling, hiking, horseback riding, and may include small play areas. They are of sufficient width to protect the resource and provide maximum use. They are built or natural corridors such as utility right-of-ways, bluffs, vacant railroad right-of-ways or converted roads that often link components of the recreation system or community facilities such as schools, natural areas or other developed park areas.

Note: Community gardens are most commonly located in mini, neighborhood, community, parks.



San Mateo County policies on size, location and purpose of County Parks.

“The County park and recreation system is presently oriented toward the preservation of natural areas because the majority of facilities are rural in nature, offering mostly low intensity types of activities. The system, however, in seeking to provide a balanced group of facilities, does feature some sites for more activity types of recreation, such as Coyote Point Recreation Area.”



The 1986 San Mateo County General Plan and Policies. In addition to this natural area orientation for County parks, the General Plan continues to state the “throughout the County, cities own/operate most of the facilities which provide for active types of recreation” and that most of the city parks serve individual neighborhoods. It is County policy that parks serve the recreation needs of the County in a balanced approach and County-wide. “County is better suited to bridge the gap in services left by municipalities and serve the needs of the County-wide population.” County-wide is defined as serving the needs for multiple cities and not an individual unincorporated area or neighborhood. The General Plan advises that parks and recreation serving individual cities or unincorporated areas are best provided by the cities or in the case of unincorporated areas, by the Special Districts where they exist.

Within the General Plan, there is a classification system for County parks: Park, Recreation Area, Natural Preserve, Wild Area, Linear Park and Trail, and Historic Site. It is County policy that all potential acquisitions be classified based on this system. There is no distinct classification for the current growing interest in the County acquiring playgrounds and small neighborhood parks in residential areas, although if pressed, pocket or neighborhood parks fit best under the “Recreation Area” classification which are defined as parks within 15 minutes of urban areas.

The cost of operation and maintenance is an important consideration when considering new park acquisitions and developments. Policies for implementing the General Plan include direction to submit to the Board of Supervisors an estimate of cost of

maintenance and operation at the time of any acquisition and/or development project is recommended. In addition, the General Plan identifies the need for clearly defined roles of jurisdictional responsibilities.

The San Mateo County Parks Strategic Plan, March 2013, emphasizes stewardship of the rich natural, cultural and historic resources found in the County's park system. "Through stewardship, San Mateo County Parks preserves our County's natural and cultural treasures, and provides safe, accessible parks, recreation and learning opportunities to enhance the community's quality of life." (San Mateo County Parks' Mission).

At the time the Strategic Plan was developed, County Parks maintenance and service level were determined to be low. The Plan advocates revenue generating opportunities, increased volunteer support and partnerships, and improved efficiencies. The Plan also encourages enhanced programming, particularly for youth. The 2013 Strategic Plan focuses on reducing maintenance backlog and maintaining the current facilities. By omission, the Plan does not include goals to increase the number of parks or expanding facilities. There is no reference to increasing facilities or service levels in neighborhood parks within Unincorporated County areas.

Midcoast Action Plan for Parks and Recreation, June 2007, includes recommendations for several neighborhood parks and connecting trails. "The park and recreation resources envisioned in this Action Plan include neighborhood parks, community parks with playfields, a community recreation building and a Midcoast trail system. The intent of the system is to fulfill the documented local neighborhood needs of Montara, Moss Beach, El Granada, Princeton, and Miramar." The Mid-Coast Plan also maintains that, traditionally, the County's niche and success has been in fulfilling the needs in the category of regional parks. "Planning, development, management, and operations within regional parks is vastly different than within the mini-neighborhood community park category, requiring different personnel, resources and management."

The Mid-Coast Recreational Needs Assessment conducted in preparation for the Mid-Coast Action Plan includes classifications and minimum park standards based on the NRPA standards cited above. The needs assessment also includes estimated costs to achieve these standards for both current and projected future population size. The Midcoast Action Plan includes recommendations for governance and funding source which include a Special District (i.e. Community Services District), increased volunteerism, establishing a Friends group and supporting County assistance through passage of Measure A. The Midcoast Plan helps to further the progress of the Board of Supervisors as presented in their **Shared Vision 2010 Goals and Commitments**.

Existing and Proposed Neighborhood Parks within San Mateo County

Name	Park District	Acres	Activities/Facilities	Status
Moss Beach Park	IV	.6 acres	Extensive wooden play structure, statute, basketball court, picnic tables. Restroom purchased to install.	New park 12/2013. County maintenance through 2014.
Princeton by the Sea/Clipper Ridge	IV	1.5	2 play structures, basketball ½ court, bench	County owned property, HOA maintenance, Needs MOU
Friendship Park	II	.25	Kaboom grant to build play structure. Collective Roots to build community garden.	SF PUC license. Playground is open,
El Granada School	II		Ball field improvements	School maintenance
Farallones School	II		Ball field improvements proposed.	School maintenance would be required.

Recommendations

The demand for neighborhood or mini parks continues to grow within the Unincorporated County. Even though the most recent San Mateo County Parks Strategic Plan does not specify goals for neighborhood parks, and the San Mateo County General Plan emphasizes larger, natural parks typically located in the rural parts of the County, the requests for these smaller, more developed neighborhood parks continue in Unincorporated areas that do not have Special Districts that provide these services. Clearly San Mateo County residents, particularly in the Unincorporated County areas, are looking to County government to fill the unmet needs in their communities. Is it time to change County Park policy to include the operation and maintenance of neighborhood parks? Should the County serve as a bridge to fill the gap until these unincorporated areas are taxed and served by a community services district or are incorporated? Understanding the important community benefits parks provide, the following are recommended approaches to fill the gap:

- 1) County Parks may assist in securing grants or other outside funding sources to develop or replace playground structures and ball fields.
- 2) Improvements funded in whole or in part by County funds will be operated and maintained by the local community. (Non-Profit, Homeowners Association, School District, or Special District).
- 3) In cases where the County has agreed to provide O&M, the estimated costs will be listed in a separate line item for funding in the budget process.
- 4) The County will propose to amend the General Plan to include classification for mini and neighborhood parks.
- 5) Following policy in the General Plan, the County will phase development of mini and neighborhood parks in order to evaluate the success of operation, maintenance, recreational use, and visitor satisfaction.