

## 2

### Plan Development



#### Edinburg Parks and Recreation Master Plan

This Parks and Recreation Master Plan was developed over an eight-month period with a view to achieving community livability through an enhanced parks and recreation system. Central to the plan development process was public involvement, as demonstrated in the fact that public participation is one of the guiding principles of the Plan.

Public participation was central to the Plan because the City recognized the value of involving the community. It is the community members themselves who partake in daily activities, whether by engaging in passive or active forms of recreational activity, and/or partaking in direct use (e.g. playing in parks) or indirect use (views of parks) of the parks system. It is these experiences that equip local citizens to contribute value to the process by identifying the current issues, problems, and needs that can be addressed through the Plan. Ultimately, this information can serve to identify goals and objectives, and assist in determining the current and future parks and recreation needs and corresponding priorities for implementation.

In planning for the future of Edinburg's parks and recreation system, it is logical that current residents – people with a vested interest - should be encouraged to participate in the development of the Plan. Soliciting the input of citizens early in the development process, and throughout its many stages, allows people to become engaged, ultimately creating a sense of ownership. Engagement and ownership are critical during the plan development process, but also following the adoption of a plan. One of the principles of the Plan is to create a planning process that will continuously offer opportunities for incremental evaluation and review. This can only be effective if the public is involved in the process to provide feedback on the efficacy of the policies once they are implemented.

Public involvement establishes trust, understanding, appreciation, and open communication with City staff, members of the Parks and Recreation Board, citizen volunteers and the elected officials. Since public participation is integral to planning in general, steps taken to encourage public participation in the Plan may build momentum and give way to higher rates of participation in the Comprehensive Plan development process and its future implementation, as well as future planning activities that may include for example, a Downtown Master Plan.

" ... there is often a discrepancy between a professional perception of what a community will need in the future and the idea that residents have for themselves. It is often a combination of these two perceptions that acts as a guide for change in a community" (Friedman, 2002, 55).

Finally, public participation efforts generate a constituency of persons interested in seeing the Plan through to its successful implementation. Policy implementation is a true measure of success. Flexibility in responding to changing needs and requirements is also critical given that one of the Plan's foundation principles is that recreation facilities will be planned and coordinated to allow for flexibility in adapting to future community needs and requirements. It follows that the City needs to engage in pulse-taking activities with a dedicated group of individuals who trust that their views will be addressed, and who understand the value of their participation.

### 2.1 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT ■ ■ ■

Five key stakeholder groups were involved in the development of the Plan including, City of Edinburg staff, City Council, the Parks and Recreation Board, the Citizens' Delegation, and the public. The latter four groups underscore the emphasis on public involvement as part of the plan development process. As elected members of the community, councilors must represent the interests of their constituents. As such, Council's involvement in plan development, and ultimately, the approval process, was critical to ensuring that community interests were met. Similar to the City Council, the Parks Board and Citizens' Delegation were tasked with representing the community's interests. The general public is more complex as it represents a multi-layered, diverse mix of people from the community with different interests, abilities, levels of knowledge, and desires in participating in the public process. As such, different techniques were used, ranging from a large Citizens' Congress to small key stakeholder interviews, to obtain public input and ensure that the general public was kept abreast of the Plan's progress.

The following describes the public participation process, outlining the steps that were taken to ensure that public involvement was interwoven into the plan development process.

#### **City Council**

The City Council was engaged in the development of the Plan from the beginning of the project, as demonstrated by the initial briefing to City Council that occurred in November 2004. This meeting provided an opportunity for the consultant to interface with Council, provide an overview of the project, and briefly introduce key issues and objectives. In March 2005, members of the City Council who were present at the Citizens' Delegation were given a project status report at which time issues, questions, and concerns were raised. In June 2005, Council participated in an implementation workshop and finally, held a public hearing to approve the Plan. Engaging

the Council in the development of the Plan during the course of the project ensured that, at the time of plan approval, Council understood the issues and objectives, and all its concerns had been addressed prior to the time when it had to issue a decision to approve the Plan.

### **Parks and Recreation Board**

The Parks and Recreation Board is comprised of nine members of the community that are appointed by Council. Each member of the Parks Board serves a three-year term. Parks Board members represent the public's interests in that they are individual members of the community who have diverse interests, abilities, and ideas. Collectively, this diversity provides an unbiased and potentially innovative approach to parks and recreation issues, problems, and strategic planning.

During the course of the project, three Parks and Recreation Board meetings were held during the months of January, April, and May 2005. The purpose of these meetings was to discuss the draft elements of the Plan and receive comments for inclusion in the final Parks and Recreation Master Plan prior to submission for adoption.

The first Parks Board meeting was held in January 2005. The objective was to review and discuss draft [Chapter One, Introduction](#); [Chapter Three, Goals and Objectives](#); [Chapter Four, Environmental Scan](#); [Chapter Five, Facility Standards](#); and, preliminary findings of [Chapter Six, Needs Assessment](#). The meeting was effective in terms of providing an opportunity to discuss key issues and provide comments on draft elements of the Plan. The preliminary findings of the needs assessment generated the most discussion among the Parks Board members. The meeting revealed a general desire among members to pursue partnership opportunities with the Edinburg Consolidated Independent School District (ECISD) to acquire, develop, and maintain parks such as has been done with Trevino Park. Further to this point, it was noted that while schools have the potential to serve a parks and recreation function for the broader community, particularly in an underserved area such as north Edinburg, school yards do not currently have adequate equipment (e.g. basketball nets) to allow them to serve this purpose. The final key issue that was discussed regarding the preliminary needs assessment findings related to the parkland dedication ordinance. The Parks Board discussed alternative means to acquire parkland to meet the projected deficit, including an impact fee on both residential and commercial properties. Following the Parks Board meeting, the options for the parks and recreation system plan were revised to reflect the aforementioned issues, among others. These changes were made along with changes to the other

draft elements of the Plan, and later, submitted as draft final copies. For minutes of the first and subsequent Parks Board meetings, refer to [Appendix A, Meeting Minutes](#).

The second Parks Board meeting took place in April 2005 to discuss draft [Chapter Six, Needs Assessment](#) and [Chapter Seven, Implementation](#). Parks Board members provided valuable insight regarding the draft elements of the Plan. In particular, thoughtful discussion was had regarding the need to partner with the ECISD on park acquisition, development, and maintenance. The Board also highlighted a need for the conceptual trail system to be located in proximity to where development exists and growth is occurring. Regarding the implementation element of the Plan, the Board suggested that a checklist be included so as to clearly identify milestone priorities, responsibilities, and progress in achieving actions within the implementation plan.

The third Parks Board meeting took place in May 2005. The focus of the meeting was to review a complete copy of the draft plan, accept final comments for inclusion in the adopted document, and hear a critique of the current parkland dedication ordinance. A proposed new park zone map was presented and discussed, with agreement to add more zones to the north of town and to realign the other boundary lines. At the conclusion of the meeting, the Board authorized approval of the Plan for adoption by the City Council.

### **Citizens' Delegation**

In December 2004, a Citizens' Delegation was appointed by City Council. The 17 members were selected to represent each of the major groups and organizations in the community and throughout the City's planning area. Membership in the Citizens' Delegation included for example, representation from the Boys and Girls Club, ECISD, University of Texas – Pan American, Edinburg Chamber of Commerce, and the Parks and Recreation Board.

Throughout the plan development process, the role of the Citizens' Delegation was to :

- ◆ Serve as representatives of, and liaisons for, other stakeholders in the community;
- ◆ Oversee the citizen involvement process to ensure adequate representation of all persons and community interests;
- ◆ Ensure the incorporation of the community's values into all aspects of the Plan;

- ◆ Provide a citizen’s perspective as a means of ensuring community needs are met and objectives are achieved;
- ◆ Provide objective input into the Plan, including development of the vision, identification of issues, needs, solutions, and priorities;
- ◆ Provide comments on draft elements of the Plan; and,
- ◆ Generate community support for improvement ideas and Plan concepts.

The first meeting of the Citizens’ Delegation was held in December 2004 to introduce the Plan and its broad goals and objectives. The objective of the meeting was also to discuss the roles and responsibilities of the Citizens’ Delegation, provide an overview of the project schedule, and discuss public involvement in the development of the Comprehensive Plan as well as the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. During this meeting, a Citizens’ Delegation Chair was elected. For minutes of the first and subsequent Citizens’ Delegation meetings, refer to [Appendix A, Meeting Minutes](#).

The second meeting of the Citizens’ Delegation was held in January, 2005. While the focus of the Citizens’ Delegation is on the development of the Comprehensive Plan, the Parks and Recreation Master Plan falls within the purview of the Comprehensive Plan. As such, the meeting was an opportunity for members of the Citizens’ Delegation to be updated on the progress of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. The meeting also provided an opportunity to review and discuss draft [Chapter One, Introduction](#); [Chapter Three, Goals and Objectives](#); [Chapter Four, Environmental Scan](#); [Chapter Five, Facility Standards](#); and, preliminary finds of [Chapter Six, Needs Assessment](#).

The third and fourth meetings of the Citizens’ Delegation took place in March and April, 2005, respectively. The former meeting was dedicated solely to the Comprehensive Plan that was being developed concurrent to the Park Master Plan. The latter meeting provided an opportunity to discuss and provide comments on the Comprehensive Plan as well as draft [Chapter Six, Needs Assessment](#) and [Chapter Seven, Implementation](#) of the Park Master Plan.

### **General Public**

In keeping with one of the key plan principles, that being that the public will be involved in all stages of the planning process, a Citizens’ Congress was held by the City in December 2004. The primary objective of the Citizens’ Congress was to identify citizen perceptions of issues and problems in the community related to a range of topics including parks and livability, economic development, infrastructure, and land use. A further objective was

to identify options to address these issues and problems, and finally, to assign priority to the options that were identified.

The aforementioned information was solicited with a view to identifying the goals and objectives for both the Comprehensive Plan and the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. The goals and objectives reflect the community's priorities for ongoing development and growth management of the City. In terms of the Master Plan, it was important to determine the community's priorities since ultimately, these are the park users' priorities. A user-based approach to assessment and plan development was central to the Plan, and very much in line with its underlying principle of public participation.

The Citizens' Congress was a critical milestone in the plan development process since it generated the information required to develop the goals and objectives that provide direction for policy development and decision-making. Ultimately, these goals and objectives serve as benchmarks for implementation and evaluation of the Master Plan – critical steps in the plan development process.

To ensure broad representation of the public's interests, the consultant worked with the City in advance of the meeting to encourage strong public participation in the Citizens' Congress. Methods for promoting the meeting included media clips in the local paper and on the local public access television channel, information on the municipal website, and promotional flyers in key public locations such as City Hall, the recreation center, and the public library.

Further to the Citizens' Congress, stakeholder consultations were also held. Representatives of the Edinburg Pony Baseball/Softball Association, Edinburg Soccer Association, and the Edinburg Youth Tackle Football Association were contacted to attend a consultation session. A representative of the University of Texas – Pan American was also invited to attend the consultation session given his expertise and interest in parks and recreation. Consultation sessions were scheduled for December 8<sup>th</sup> and December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2004.

**Observation Study** - A participant observation study was also conducted to evaluate the average daily use of parks and associated facilities. Observations of park users were conducted on two separate occasions in each park; once during the week (mid-day) and once on a typical weekend (mid-day) over fifteen-minute observation periods. The study revealed a couple of key findings. For example, the number of park users tended to be higher in each

park during weekend versus weekday observations. The study also revealed that the regional park and community parks were more frequented than neighborhood and mini-parks. This type of valuable insight can only be gained through observing the park users (the public). It is recommended that further observation studies take place to provide more detailed insight into park usage. This approach is in keeping with one of the Plan's principles - that design will consider the needs, desires, and opinions of users. Participant observation is a means to achieve a better fit between the needs and desires of users and improvements to existing parks and the design of new parks.

**Citizens' Questionnaire** - The public was involved in the development of the Plan through a citizens' questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to assess usage patterns and local perceptions of the existing parks and recreation system, and to identify community needs and desires related to the future of the parks and recreation system. The questionnaire revealed that the primary reason cited by respondents as to why they visit some parks or facilities "almost never" or "never" was inconvenience/location (22.6 percent), followed by lack of things to do/limited facilities/lack of facilities of interest (7.8 percent). These findings point to a need to develop more parks in strategic locations throughout the City so that parks are located in closer proximity to where citizens live. The findings also reveal the need to develop a system of trails and parks so as to increase connectivity and, in turn, improve convenience and accessibility. When asked specifically what types of parks and facilities respondents would like to see created or improved to enhance the quality of parks and recreation, restrooms (11.4 percent) was cited most often, followed by athletic fields and courts (9.9 percent), and an indoor recreation facility (9.9 percent). While these findings are not statistically valid, they provide a snapshot of the community's needs, underscoring the value of public participation. For more information on the results of the citizens' questionnaire, refer to [Chapter Four, Environmental Scan](#).

Finally, the public was involved in the plan development process through an Open House that was held in July, 2005. The event was focused on sharing the findings of the Comprehensive Plan and Parks and Recreation Master Plan. The primary public comment received was a need for parks within the developing outlying areas of the City's ETJ. This comment was addressed by making adjustments to the recommended park zones to ensure equity in the distribution of future park locations.