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INTRODUCTION

Public parks play an integral part in the quality of life in any community. They provide larger open areas for sporting activities, play, and relaxation than are available to most residential lots and constitute breaks in and relief from the built environment. They can be located within residential, business or industrial areas and may serve a neighborhood, the community at large, or the region. The Parks and Recreation Element documents the inventory of existing parks and recreation facilities and improvements, identifies standards of development, assesses needs and priorities based upon local standards and citizen input, and recommends a framework for development of an adequate parks and recreation system to meet the current and future needs of the community through the year 2025.

The primary focus of this element is to enhance existing parks, recreation, and open space opportunities for all Lake County citizens and visitors. This element is intended to identify the community's needs and priorities for the acquisition, development and long-term maintenance of an adequate parks and recreation system. The parks and recreation element will serve as a guide to the general locations and types of park areas and recreation facilities needed to adequately accommodate the existing and projected future needs of the community. There are different expectations and service requirements based on the nature of the urban, suburban, or rural character of the different areas within the county. Lake County will strive to locate facilities that address these differences.

The goal of the Parks and Recreation Element is to facilitate the development and management of parks and facilities for a recreation system that includes environmental lands, trails, and other recreational opportunities that meets the diverse needs of a growing community. It is also intended to provide a balance between public demands for recreation activities and facilities and available resources. Data that included population growth, demographic characteristics, safety, historical considerations and proximity to other population centers and major recreation areas were used in the formulation of policies. The most important considerations of this Plan were public desires and funding sources available to the County.

DEFINITIONS

Community park: means a park located near major roadways, and designed to serve the needs of more than one neighborhood.

Neighborhood park: a park which serves the population of a neighborhood and is generally accessible by bicycle or pedestrian ways.

Open spaces: undeveloped lands suitable for passive recreation or conservation uses.

Park: a neighborhood, community, or regional park.

Public access: the ability of the public to physically reach, enter or use recreation sites including beaches and shores.

Recreation: the pursuit of leisure time activities occurring in an indoor or outdoor setting.

Regional park: a park which is designed to serve two or more communities.

GOAL REC 1

Lake County shall facilitate the development and management of parks and facilities for a recreation system that includes environmental lands, trails, and other recreational opportunities that meets the diverse needs of a growing community.

OBJECTIVE 1.0 CUSTOMERS

The residents in Lake County are our most important customer.

1.1 Parks and Recreation System

Lake County will develop, operate, and promote a parks and recreation system that provides all residents with quality leisure opportunities.

1.2 Lake County Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee

The Lake County Parks and Recreation Advisory Board shall include citizen representatives to further the goal envisioned by this Element.

1.3 Planning Process

When developing new parks and facilities, Lake County shall include nearby residents and other interested parties in the planning process.

OBJECTIVE 2.0 COMMUNICATION

Lake County shall develop programs to communicate the recreational amenities of Lake County to residents and visitors.

2.1 Coordination

Lake County Parks and Recreation shall coordinate with Lake County Economic Development and Tourism to help promote Lake County's parks, trails, cultural events, natural areas, and special events to visitors.

2.2 Facility Development

Lake County should support the development of quality athletic and community facilities to attract state, regional, and national tournaments and events to Lake County. Such facilities should also be available to residents of Lake County for cultural and athletic programs when not hosting special events.

2.3 Promotional Program

Lake County shall develop and distribute a promotional guide for parks and recreation facilities, environmental lands, and trails owned and operated by the County. Such brochures and promotional materials should be available at all public facilities, schools, libraries, and other public facilities throughout the County.

OBJECTIVE 3.0 FACILITY LOCATION

There are different expectations and service requirements based on the nature of the urban, suburban, or rural character of the different areas within the county. Lake County will strive to locate facilities that address these differences.

3.1 Recreation Planning Areas (RPAs)

Recreation Planning Areas (RPAs) will be established based on location, growth patterns, and the individual character of each particular area.

3.2 Partnership Plan

Lake County shall work toward creating a model for a City/County/Private Partnership plan.

OBJECTIVE 4.0 FACILITY DEVELOPMENT

Lake County will facilitate the development of a well-balanced system of community and regional facilities that include active and resource based recreational opportunities to meet a variety of needs for individuals as well as groups.

4.1 Park Classification System

The park classification system in Lake County will be limited to community parks, regional parks, and special facilities. Parks will be further classified as either resource-based or activity-based.

4.2 Existing Parks

Existing mini parks, neighborhood parks and parcels of undeveloped land less than 10 acres in size currently maintained by Lake County should be evaluated for potential phase out. Any new parks developed by Lake County shall be community parks or larger.

4.3 Level of Service

The adopted Level of Service shall be 4 acres per 1000 people.

4.4 Park Facilities Inventory

Lake County Parks and Recreation shall maintain an up to date inventory of all Lake County maintained park facilities.

4.5 Mandatory Dedication of Land for Recreation Space

Lake County shall incorporate provisions within its Land Development Regulations which require new residential development to provide recreation space consistent with the Concurrency Management System. The provision of open space for activity-based recreation shall be in addition to the area required for open space.

4.6 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)

Lake County will use, as a guideline, the activity standards suggested in the 'State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan' (SCORP) for Florida, as updated on a regular basis.

4.7 Outsourcing

Lake County should consider the possibility of outsourcing park maintenance for activities where appropriate.

4.8 Phased Development and Renovation Plan

Lake County will create and approve a phased development and renovation plan for the existing parks in the System to determine appropriate development of new facilities and/or phase out of parkland that does not meet the objectives of the Lake County Parks Master Plan.

OBJECTIVE 5.0 TRAILS AND GREENWAYS

Lake County shall foster the development of a comprehensive greenway, blueway, trails, equestrian and bikeway system that provides for the protection of natural resources, scenic value, eco-tourism, and resource-oriented recreation.

5.1 Trails Program

Lake County shall continue working towards implementing its trails program by coordinating with federal, state, regional, and local public agencies and private organizations.

5.2 Greenways and Blueways

Lake County shall coordinate the establishment of greenways and blueways with its trails and bikeways program to help connect natural resources and parks to the trail system.

5.2.1 Interconnectivity

The County shall strive to interconnect existing and future dedicated open space areas, pedestrian and bicycle trails, hiking trails, equestrian trails, canoe runs, and where appropriate, utility corridors, into the greenways and blueways network.

5.2.2 Incentives

The County shall consider incentives to private landowners to encourage their participation in the creation of the greenways system.

5.2.3 Greenway Land Acquisition Priority List

The County shall adopt a greenway land acquisition priority list to assist in identifying and coordinating the acquisition or protection of the elements of the greenway.

5.2.4 Greenway Management Plan

The County shall develop a master management plan for the greenway network and specific plans for lands acquired, preserved, or otherwise included in the greenways network that address protection of natural resources, public access, recreation, education, and opportunities for ecotourism that are complementary to maintaining integrity of the network.

5.3 Guidelines for Trail Development

Lake County shall adopt as a guideline the Florida Bicycle Facilities Planning and Design Handbook by FDOT and the Florida Office of Greenways and Trails Reference and Resource Guide. These documents shall be used in the planning and development of trails.

5.4 Maintenance and Operation Standards

Maintenance and operation standards shall be developed and approved prior to new trail design and development.

OBJECTIVE 6.0 ACCESS AND AVAILABILITY

Lake County will ensure equal access and maximum availability to all facilities to the greatest extent possible, consistent with the protection of natural resources.

6.1 Access ways

Lake County shall design, construct, and manage parks and trails with access ways that are compatible with the natural features and character of the individual park site.

6.2 Linkages

Sidewalks, bikeways, and/or trails should be provided to link residential areas, community facilities, schools, and other park sites where feasible.

6.3 Parking

Parking areas and bicycle racks, where appropriate, will be provided at recreation sites.

6.4 Barrier-free Access

Lake County shall ensure the provision of disabled parking spaces and barrier-free access to activity-based parks and facilities, where practical and appropriate.

OBJECTIVE 7.0 FINANCE

Lake County shall identify and implement methods to finance the on-going operation and management of its recreational facilities.

7.1 Streamlining of Facilities

Lake County will streamline its parks and recreation facilities and programs to focus on providing larger scale facilities to supplement existing city and county recreation facilities, natural resource based parks, and a trails system linking these facilities together.

7.2 Revenue Generation

Design of new facilities should consider revenue-generating opportunities that could offset operational costs and/or enhance the recreational experience of participants (i.e. concessions, rentals, etc) as appropriate and consistent with the protection of natural resources.

7.3 Grant Program

The County's grant programs should be refined to be consistent with the goals and objectives of the Lake County Parks Master Plan and expanded to more adequately address the impact of unincorporated residents on municipal recreation facilities and programs.

7.4 Capital Funding Source

The County shall evaluate the establishment of a reliable and consistent capital funding source for recreation facilities and operations to help implement the policies contained in this Element.

7.5 Fees and Charges

The County shall adopt fees and charges, where appropriate, for the Parks and Recreation System that is fair and equitable to residents and visitors that use County facilities.

7.6 Facility Maintenance Costs

New park and trail development shall address the cost to maintain each facility prior to implementation. Design/maintenance techniques, materials, and procurement methods should be used that provide the most cost effective measures to develop, as well as maintain, the park and trail facilities.

OBJECTIVE 8.0 PARTNERSHIPS

Lake County shall develop and maintain partnerships with the municipalities, the Lake County School Board and the Lake County Water Authority as well as not-for-profit organizations and the private sector.

8.1 Coordination and Facilitation

Lake County shall coordinate the development of recreational facilities and work with federal, state, regional, and local agencies to facilitate recreation programs.

8.2 Alternative Funding Sources

Lake County shall continue to investigate alternative funding sources and relationships to provide for public park facilities, programs, and management.

8.3 Co-location

Lake County and the School Board should further work to co-locate sites for new and existing schools and parks where feasible. Lake County should work with the School Board to identify possible joint opportunities to provide athletic and recreation opportunities for students and residents. A school/park design model should be developed to be used for planning such joint facilities. Lake County and the School Board should also work to identify existing school sites for possible improvements to better accommodate public recreation usage.

8.4 Mutual Use Agreement

Lake County should work with the School Board to develop a model 'Mutual Use Agreement' for the use of school and park facilities for public use.

8.5 Interlocal Agreements

Lake County shall coordinate with the County's municipalities and adjacent counties for the provision of public parks and recreational programming through the use of interlocal agreements.

8.6 Non-Profit Recreation Providers

Lake County shall develop agreements with non-profit recreation providers such as the YMCA and Boys and Girls Club to provide recreational programming and facilities.

8.7 Joint Agency Funding

Lake County shall pursue joint agency funding for the purchase, development, and management of public parks, environmental lands, and trails.

GOAL REC 2

Lake County shall guide the acquisition, protection and management of lands for the development of parks, open space and recreation opportunities.

OBJECTIVE 9.0 OPEN SPACE PROTECTION

Lake County shall assure the provision of open space within the county by requiring minimum open space standards for new development, through public land acquisition and through designation of Conservation and Recreation land use categories on the Future Land Use map.

9.1 Provision of Access to Lake County's Lakes

Lake County shall provide access to lakes and waterways through maintenance and enhancement of its public boat ramp parks. Additional public boat ramp parks shall be provided when the demand caused by future residents warrants additional sites and facilities.

9.2 Protect and Preserve Environmentally Sensitive Lands as Open Space

Lake County shall, through the Land Development Regulations, provide a mechanism to protect, acquire or otherwise set aside natural areas and environmentally sensitive lands as open space for permanent preservation and/or passive recreation. Protection can be accomplished by the donation of land or establishment of a permanent conservation easement held by the County, conservation agency, or appropriate non-profit conservation entity. The protection and acquisition of these lands shall be consistent with the Future Land Use Element and Conservation Element.

9.3 Participation in State and Local Land Acquisition Programs

Lake County shall partner with federal, state, and regional agencies in the purchase of environmentally-sensitive lands, with emphasis on identified state projects including the Wekiva-Ocala Greenway, Wekiva Study Area, Green Swamp, Emeralda Marsh, and Lake Wales Ridge. The County shall as appropriate recommend additional property for acquisition and assist in the preparation of boundary amendments for state acquisition project areas through the Acquisition and Restoration Council. Further, Lake County shall pursue the acquisition of lands deemed to have local conservation, historic, or recreational value. The County shall utilize funding from the voter-approved Lake County Land Acquisition Program,

and shall to the greatest extent possible, partner with state programs such as the Florida Communities Trust as well as with private conservation organizations to maximize acquisition opportunities.

9.4 Protection from Incompatible Land Uses

The Land Development Regulations shall require through the site plan and development review process the protection of conservation, recreation, and open space areas from incompatible adjacent land uses and activities.

Adjacent land uses that are considered incompatible with conservation, recreation, and open space areas include Heavy Industry. All other land uses shall be required to use screening and ample vegetated buffers to limit off-site impacts. Land uses adjacent to and near resource-based conservation and recreation sites shall be of a low density and intensity as defined in the Future Land Use Element.

Additional land development regulations shall be established to limit the undesirable intrusion of noise, light, access, and other impacts onto conservation and recreation lands from adjacent property.

9.5 Open Space Definition within a Development Site

For the purpose of determining the minimum amount of required open space within a development site, the following definition shall apply: Open space shall be defined as the land area that remains undeveloped or minimally developed, such as trails and boardwalks, as part of a natural resource preserve or passive recreation area and shall include land preserved for conservation purposes. Within a development site, the county shall require that a minimum quantity of buildable area remain preserved, which shall represent the minimum open space requirement. The minimum required open space shall exclude water bodies, wetlands, residential lots, street rights of way, parking lots, impervious surfaces, and active recreation areas. Minimum required open space may include permeable stormwater management areas if enhanced as amenities utilizing native vegetation. Golf courses shall be generally excluded with the exception that areas of a golf course that are naturally vegetated and not subject to regular chemical application may be credited towards the minimum open space requirement, and provided that the golf course is certified as being in compliance with BMP's described in "Protecting Florida's Springs-Land Use Planning Strategies and Best Management Practices" by the Department of Community Affairs & Department of Environmental Protection dated November 2002. The minimum required quantity of open space within a development site shall be calculated over the net buildable area of a parcel, which is defined as the total area of a parcel less wetlands and water bodies. Non-buildable areas, including wetlands and water bodies, are recognized as protected features but shall not be credited toward the minimum open space requirement.

9.6 Environmentally Sensitive Lands as Open Space

Open space within a development project shall include the environmentally sensitive lands on the project site. Further, to the maximum extent practical, all development shall be clustered away from any environmentally sensitive lands.

9.7 Open Space Requirements for Planned Unit Developments

Lake County shall require within the Land Development Regulations that Residential Planned Unit Developments set aside at a minimum 25 percent of the net buildable area of a project site as open space for conservation purposes. Within designated overlay districts or special areas defined by the Future Land Use Element, the minimum quantity of required open space may be greater as part of a conservation subdivision design. The provision of open space shall emphasize the protection of existing natural areas containing native plant and animal species, wildlife corridors, karst features, and aquifer recharge potential.

9.8 Forms of Open Space

Lake County recognizes the following general forms of open space

Conservation Open Space: Natural areas that are permanently protected from development for the purpose of conserving natural resources including but not limited to habitat, wildlife, wilidlife corridors, environmentally-sensitive features, and aquifer recharge. Uses within conservation open space are limited to preservation and passive recreation.

Utility Open Space: Outdoor areas unsuitable for development because of the potential threat to public health and safety as a result of the presence of a public or private utility. Such areas include but are not limited to drainage canals, airport flight paths clear zones, and regional electric or gas utility easements.

Transportation Corridor Open Space: This open space type constitutes areas separating development from transportation corridors and areas that improve the aesthetic character or recreational benefit of a transportation corridor. Such areas include buffer areas adjacent to roadways and bicycle/pedestrian/equestrian paths.

Multiple-Purpose Open Space: This type of open space can serve one or more of the above open space types.