

Introduction

Spanning approximately six (6) square miles, the City of Gardena is bounded by the unincorporated communities of West Athens to the north and West Rancho Dominguez to the east, and by the cities of Carson to the southeast, Torrance to the southwest, and Lawndale and Hawthorne to the west. Gardena's unique character, community facilities, open spaces, and established neighborhoods contribute to a well-rounded and diverse city.

As a largely built-out community, parks and open space play an important role in maintaining Gardena's character and overall quality of life. These spaces provide opportunities for recreation, relaxation, and community gathering while enhancing the visual appeal of the urban environment. Gardena currently provides approximately 51.6 acres of parkland and recreation spaces, including eight parks and three standalone recreation facilities.

The Open Space Plan presents a comprehensive vision for how the City will preserve, expand, and enhance its parks, recreational assets, and community facilities. This Plan outlines the long-term goals and policies that will guide Gardena's efforts to provide all residents with equitable access to high-quality spaces and services.

Authority

An open space element is a required component of a local government's General Plan pursuant to Section 65302(a) of the California Government Code. Its primary goal is to establish policies for the preservation, management, and creation of open spaces within a community. Broadly defined, open space refers to any land that is not developed with buildings or structures. This includes, but is not limited to, parks, trails, plazas, greenways, and landscaped medians. For the purposes of the Gardena General Plan, both the Open Space Plan and Conservation Plan comprise the Community Resources Element.

Purpose

The City of Gardena is largely built out, characterized by a dense urban environment and limited opportunities for new development. These conditions create ongoing challenges in providing residents with adequate access to parks, open space, and recreational amenities. As a result, the Open Space Plan (OSP) emphasizes the protection and enhancement of existing recreational resources while promoting innovative strategies to increase green space within the city. The OSP prioritizes the creation of inclusive and equitably distributed open spaces and community facilities that support community connection, public health, and overall well-being.

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Relationship with Other Plans and Programs

State laws and local efforts have established a range of plans and programs that are relevant to the OSP. Together, these efforts support the long-term preservation and availability of parks, open space, and natural resources for the benefit of the community.

General Plan

Land Use Plan: The Land Use Plan establishes the location, distribution, and intensity of land uses throughout the City. The Open Space Plan supports the Land Use Plan by identifying and preserving areas for parks, recreation, open space, and other community-serving uses.

Circulation Plan: The Open Space Plan supports the Circulation Plan by promoting connections between neighborhoods, parks, recreational facilities, and other open spaces. Pedestrian and bicycle facilities can enhance access to these areas and improve connectivity throughout the City.

Housing Element: The Open Space Plan supports the Housing Element by promoting access to parks, recreational opportunities, and open spaces as the City accommodates existing and future residential development.

Conservation Plan: The Open Space Plan and Conservation Plan are closely related through their shared emphasis on protecting natural resources and environmental quality. The Open Space Plan supports conservation objectives by preserving open areas, supporting urban greening, and promoting environmentally responsible management of open space.

Environmental Justice Element: The Open Space Plan supports the Environmental Justice Element by promoting equitable access to parks, recreation, urban greening, tree canopy, and other open space resources, particularly in underserved areas of the City.

City Municipal Code

The Open Space Plan of the General Plan establishes the City's long-term policies and goals for the preservation and provision of parks, open space, and natural resources. The Gardena Municipal Code implements these policies by translating them into enforceable standards, regulations, and procedures. While the General Plan serves as the City's policy framework and vision, the Municipal Code provides the legal tools that ensure development, land use decisions, zoning regulations, and project approvals are consistent with the Open Space Plan.

Quimby Act

The Quimby Act, codified in California Government Code Section 66477, allows cities and counties to require residential development projects to contribute land, in-lieu fees, or a combination of both to support the development and improvement of park and recreational facilities. In Gardena, limited vacant land, high property values, and small parcel sizes often make on-site parkland dedication impractical, resulting in most Quimby Act requirements being satisfied through in-lieu fee payments rather than land dedication. These funds have been used to enhance existing parks and upgrade recreational facilities; however, the City's fully developed urban environment significantly limits opportunities to acquire additional parkland. Consequently, the Quimby Act has played a greater role in improving the quality of existing park resources in Gardena rather than increasing the total amount of park acreage.



Sister City Harvard Parkette

Park Master Plan

In 2024, the City of Gardena updated the City of Gardena Parks and Recreation Master Plan (Master Plan). The Master Plan establishes a long-term framework for guiding investment, management, and improvement of parks and recreation facilities across the city. Developed through a combination of technical analysis and broad public engagement, the plan reflects community priorities and provides clear direction for the future of parks and recreation in Gardena.

The development of the Master Plan began with an evaluation of existing park assets, recreational opportunities, and relevant planning documents. This foundation informed a comprehensive outreach program designed to capture community needs and preferences. Engagement methods included public workshops, digital presentations, stakeholder interviews, surveys, online questionnaires, and ongoing feedback through the project website. This multi-platform approach enabled the residents to participate regardless of schedule, location, or ability to attend meetings.

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Findings from the analysis and outreach efforts informed a recommended capital investment of \$39,759,250 and a set of strategic improvements to parks, facilities, and maintenance practices. Together, these strategies are intended to align current resources with community demand, enhance recreational opportunities, and support a vibrant, healthy, and inclusive outdoor environment for residents now and in the future. The General Plan reinforces the recommendations of the Master Plan. While the Master Plan focuses on specific investments and improvements, the General Plan provides the broader policy framework to support, prioritize, and sustain those actions over time.



Arthur Lee Johnson Memorial Park

Parks and Open Space Network

Parks, open spaces, and recreational facilities are essential to fostering a comfortable, healthy, and safe environment for residents. They provide relief from the built environment and offer space for recreation, physical activity, and social interaction. As detailed in **Table OSP-1**, Gardena includes seven traditionally styled parks, one wetland preserve, and three standalone recreation facilities, together providing over 51.6 acres of parkland. As shown in **Figure 1**, existing parks and recreation facilities are relatively well distributed throughout the city, helping to provide access to open space across neighborhoods.

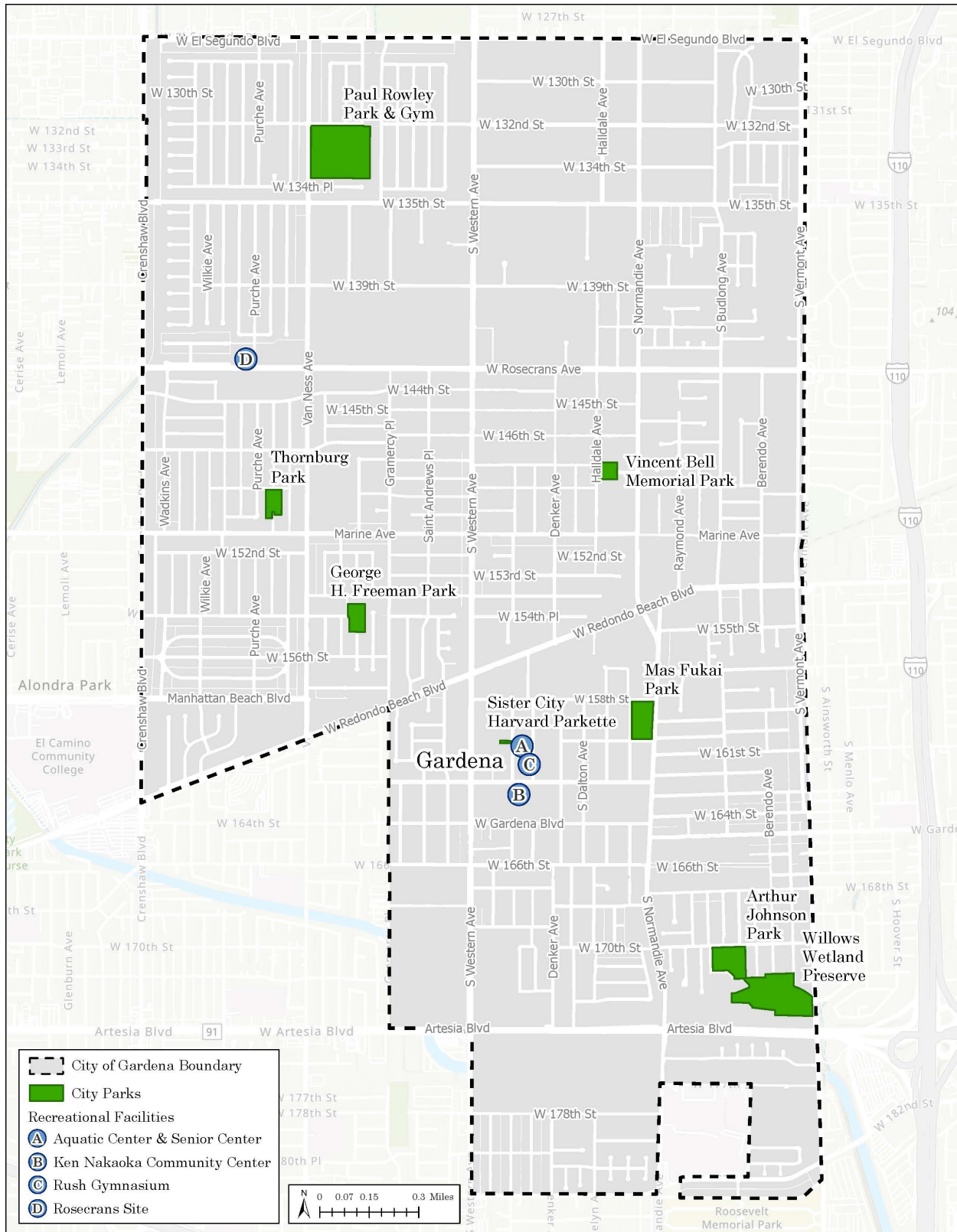
Table OSP-1
Existing Parks and Recreation Facilities

Park Name	Location	Acres	Amenities
Vincent Bell Memorial Park	14708 South Halldale Avenue	1.9	Recreation Building, Classroom, Baseball Field, Basketball Court, Handball Court, Picnic Shelters, Playground Equipment Areas, Multipurpose Field, Futsal Court, And Non-Operational Wading Pool
George H. Freeman Park	2100 West 154th Place	3.0	Classrooms, Baseball Field, Basketball Court, Picnic Shelter, Playing Field, Playground Equipment, Multipurpose Field, Tennis Court, And Futsal Court
Sister City Harvard Parkette	160th Street/Harvard Boulevard	0.15	Picnic Area
Mas Fukai Park	15800 South Brighton Avenue	4.9	Classrooms, Baseball Fields, Basketball Courts, Handball Court, Picnic Shelter, And Playground Equipment
Arthur Lee Johnson Memorial Park	1200 West 170th Street	6.8	Playground, Baseball Field, Soccer Field, Tennis Courts, Picnic Area, Meeting Room, Basketball Courts, And Skate Park.
Edward Thornburg Park	2320 West 149th Street	2.5	Recreation Building, Classroom, Baseball Field, Multipurpose Field, Basketball Courts, Handball Court, Picnic Shelters, Playground Area, Horseshoe Pitch, Multipurpose Room
Gardena Willows Wetland Preserve	1200 West 170th Street	13.6	Walking Paths, Sidewalks
Paul Rowley Park & Gym	13220 South Van Ness Avenue	18.7	Auditorium, Weight Room, Classrooms, Kitchen, Gymnasium, Baseball Fields, Basketball Courts, Tennis Courts, Picnic Shelters, Playground Equipment Areas, Non-Operational Wading Pool, And Skate Park
Ken Nakaoka Community Center	1670 West 162nd Street	-	Meeting Rooms, Auditorium, Kitchen, Stage
Aquatic Center & Senior Center	1650 West 160th Street	-	Swimming Pool
Rush Gymnasium	1651 West 162nd Street	-	Gymnasium, Basketball Courts
Rosecrans Site	<i>A 1-acre parcel recently acquired by the City for future park and recreation facilities.</i>		

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Figure 1: Existing Parks and Recreation Facilities



While all parks contribute value, they vary in size, function, amenities, and the populations they serve. The following sections describe the different types of parks and open spaces within Gardena, along with the benefits and amenities associated with each.

Parkettes

Parkettes, also known as pocket parks or mini parks, are very small public spaces, generally less than 2.5 acres, that serve the immediate surrounding neighborhood. Often located on small parcels or former vacant lots within residential or urban areas, these parks provide landscaped areas and local access to green space where larger parks may not be feasible. Parkettes typically include limited amenities such as benches, picnic tables, short walking paths, open play areas, playground equipment, and occasionally dog park features. The Sister City Harvard Parkette is an example of this park type in Gardena.

Neighborhood Parks

Neighborhood parks are public parks typically ranging from approximately 2.5 to 10 acres in size that serve surrounding residential neighborhoods within a quarter- to half-mile radius, generally equivalent to a 5- to 10-minute walk. These parks are intended to be easily accessible by pedestrians and bicyclists from their homes. Neighborhood parks provide accessible green space for individuals and families, particularly those with small private yards or those living in multi-family complexes without yard space. Common amenities and features may include playgrounds, open play areas, picnic tables, barbeques, benches, sport courts, improved walking paths, and, depending on size and use, restroom facilities and/or parking areas. Examples of neighborhood parks in Gardena are Edward Thornburg Park and Vincent Bell Memorial Park.



Edward Thornburg Park



Vincent Bell Memorial Park

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Community Parks

Community parks are larger public parks that generally range from approximately 10 to 20 acres in size, with some parks extending up to 40 acres, and are designed to serve a broader segment of the community. These parks are often located within neighborhoods or near central gathering places such as recreation centers or schools and are accessible by arterial or collector streets, as well as by pedestrians and bicyclists. Unlike neighborhood parks, community parks serve users from a wider geographic area, typically up to three miles or on a citywide basis when adjacent to or containing a community recreation facility. Their larger size allows for a wider range of amenities, including athletic fields and courts, walking and biking paths, picnic shelters, parking lots, and restroom facilities. They may also include recreation buildings and community pools. Community parks accommodate organized sports leagues, community events, and group activities not typically provided in neighborhood parks, and may also preserve unique landscapes or open space features. In Gardena, Paul Rowley Park serves as a community park.

Regional Parks

Regional parks are large green spaces, typically exceeding 40 acres, that are intended to serve residents from a broad geographic area rather than a single neighborhood or city. These parks often include amenities found in local parks, such as playgrounds and sports fields, and may also offer specialized features such as lakes, golf courses, natural areas, or museums. The City of Gardena does not have any regional parks. However, the nearby unincorporated community of El Camino Village, just one half mile south of the City, is home to Alondra Park. Alondra Park is a 53-acre park with a lake, native-plant garden, a pool, playground, golf course, and baseball fields.

Schools

Schools are an important source of open space and recreation within Gardena. The City is home to seven (7) elementary schools, one (1) middle school, and two (2) high schools, with campuses distributed throughout residential neighborhoods. Their athletic fields, courts, playgrounds, gymnasiums, and gathering spaces support organized sports, informal recreation, and community activities for residents of all ages.

Despite the multi-purpose benefits these areas provide, public access to and use of school facilities is generally limited to designated times. School sites are typically gated and locked outside of school hours, and the City does not currently have formal agreements in place with the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) or private schools to allow community use of their facilities. As a result, nearby residents are unable to use these spaces as convenient neighborhood open space during evenings, weekends, or school breaks.

Establishing shared-use agreements between the City and local schools could

significantly expand access to open space. Allowing public use of school outdoor facilities during non-school hours would increase walkable recreation opportunities, better utilize existing resources, and help address open space needs across the City.

Trails and Pathways

Trails, bicycle routes, and pedestrian pathways are important components of the City's open space system, helping connect neighborhoods to parks and recreational facilities while supporting walking and bicycling as active forms of transportation. Bicycle facilities are generally classified based on how they are designed and how they interact with motor vehicle traffic, including separated paths (Class I), bike lanes (Class II), shared roadways (Class III), and buffered/protected on-street bike routes (Class IV).

As shown in **Figure 2** most bicycle routes within the City are designated as Class III bicycle routes. Class III routes are located within the public right-of-way and are intended to encourage the shared use of streets by bicyclists and motor vehicles. These routes are identified by "Bike Route" signage and provide access to parks and other community destinations throughout the City. The City also includes a Class I bicycle path in the northwest portion of the City boundary, extending from El Segundo Boulevard to Rosecrans Avenue along the Dominguez Channel. This bike route is part of the Laguna Dominguez Trail, which is an approximately three-mile trail beginning in Hawthorne and ending in Lawndale. Class I bicycle paths are facilities designed exclusively for bicycle use and are physically separated from motor vehicle traffic, offering a higher level of comfort and safety for users.

Sidewalks are equally important in supporting pedestrian circulation and access to open space. To function effectively, sidewalks should remain clear and unobstructed. When infrastructure such as utility poles, fire hydrants, traffic signals, or streetlights must be located within sidewalk areas, they should be placed in a manner that minimizes impacts to pedestrian movement and accessibility. Sidewalks should be well maintained and compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Wetlands/Nature Preserve

Wetlands and nature preserves are valuable open spaces that protect sensitive environmental resources while providing visual and environmental relief from urban development. Even where recreational use is limited, they preserve natural landscapes, enhance environmental quality, and buffer surrounding development.

The City of Gardena is home to the Gardena Willows Wetland Preserve, an approximately 13.6-acre nature preserve that protects and restores native habitat associated with the Dominguez Slough. The Preserve functions as both an environmental resource and a community asset, providing opportunities for residents to experience nature and learn about local ecosystems. It includes walking trails and native plant demonstration gardens within an otherwise highly urbanized area. Friends of the Gardena Willows Wetland Preserve, Inc., a volunteer organization composed of local residents, provides

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environmental education, community activities, and habitat stewardship. As of this writing, the Preserve has no dedicated funding source or staff. Annual Audubon Christmas Bird Counts typically document approximately 30 bird species at the Preserve. Ground-nesting and ground-feeding birds, amphibians, and reptiles remain vulnerable to predation by raccoons, non-native squirrels, and feral or free-roaming cats.



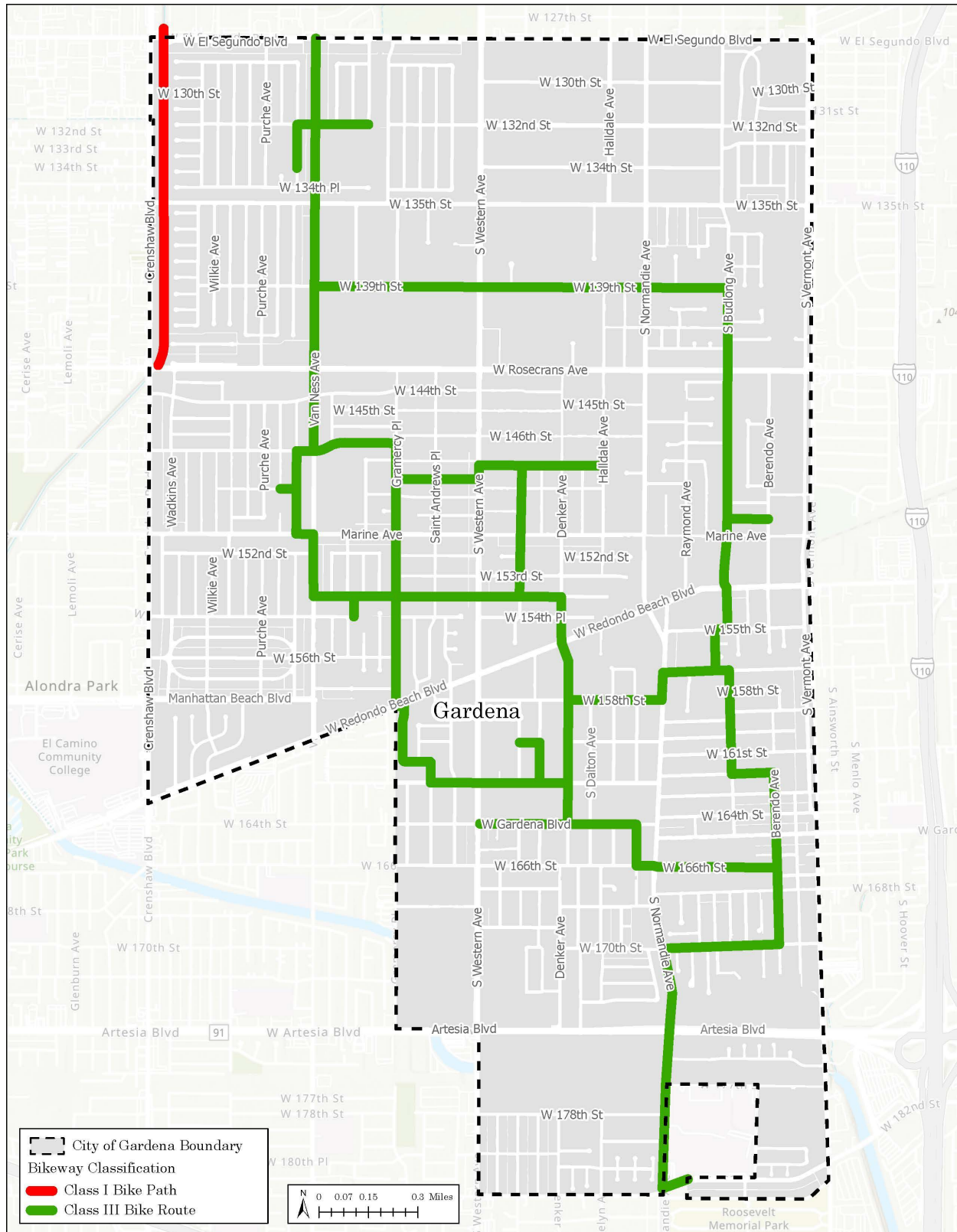
Gardena Willows Wetland Preserve

Planned Parks

The City has acquired two properties that will increase its total park acreage: an approximately 1-acre site on Rosecrans Avenue and an approximately 0.1-acre property for the expansion of Thornburg Park.

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Figure 2: Bike Routes Within Gardena



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Recreation Facilities

The City of Gardena offers three standalone recreation facilities, as well as recreational buildings located within several parks, providing residents with a range of indoor and outdoor recreation opportunities. As shown in **Figure 1** and detailed in **Table OSP-1**, these facilities function as key centers for physical activity, social interaction, and community engagement.

Ken Nakaoka Community Center

The Ken Nakaoka Community Center serves as an important hub for community activities and public gatherings. The facility provides space for community events, public meetings, and other group functions that support civic engagement and social interaction.

Prior to the construction of the new Aquatic and Senior Center (discussed later), the Ken Nakaoka Community Center also housed Gardena Senior Services. Senior programming included social and recreational activities, meal services, and opportunities for older adults to connect with one another. Programs offered a range of activities such as bingo, day trips, music and art classes, candlelight dinners, and holiday entertainment, fostering socialization and overall well-being.

Aquatic Center & Senior Center

The Gardena Community Aquatic and Senior Center will be newly constructed to expand recreational and social opportunities for residents, particularly children and older adults. The facility will feature a modern swimming pool with shaded seating, fencing, public art, and an adjacent Community Aquatic and Senior Center building. Additional amenities will include an ADA-only parking lot, landscaped lawn areas with walking paths, an outdoor fitness area with exercise equipment, five shaded picnic areas, and site-wide lighting and landscaping. Senior programs currently hosted at the Ken Nakaoka Community Center are planned to transition to the new facility upon full operation, creating a centralized location for aquatic recreation, wellness activities, and senior-focused programming.

Rush Gymnasium

Rush Gymnasium provides indoor recreational space for organized leagues, informal pickup games, and other indoor sports activities. A notable feature of the facility is its three indoor pickleball courts, which include permanent court striping and portable nets. The courts are available for public use at no cost, offering accessible recreational opportunities for residents interested in indoor sports and fitness.

Paul Rowley Park Auditorium & Gym

An amenity at Paul Rowley Park is the auditorium and gym building. This facility is a well-used community destination offering both indoor and outdoor facilities. The site regularly

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hosts a wide range of public events, from small community gatherings such as meetings and private celebrations to large-scale events, including the Gardena Jazz Festival.

Facilities at Rowley Park include indoor meeting rooms, a computer lab, gymnasium space, and outdoor event areas. Together, these amenities support recreational activities, community celebrations, sports tournaments, and special events, making the park a key gathering place for residents and visitors alike.



Paul Rowley Gym and Facilities

Parks Recreational Building Rentals

The City offers rental opportunities for picnic shelters, tennis courts, and small buildings at George Freeman Park, Mas Fukai Park, and Edward Thornburg Park, allowing residents to host gatherings, recreational activities, and small events.

Recreation Programs

Sports

Gardena offers a wide range of organized sports programs for both youth and adults, including basketball, soccer, futsal, baseball, softball, karate, flag football, tennis, gymnastics, and pickleball. Prior to each sport season, youth sports clinics are offered. These programs are designed to accommodate a variety of age groups and skill levels, providing structured opportunities for residents to engage in recreational and competitive sports.

Youth Programs

The City offers a range of youth-focused programs, including after-school programs, summer day camps, traditional youth sports, and leadership opportunities through the Gardena Youth Commission. After-school programs serve children ages 5 through 12 at Freeman Park, Arthur Lee Johnson Memorial Park, the Ken Nakaoka Community Center, and Rowley Park. During the summer, the City operates multi-week day camps for children ages 5 through 12 and a teen camp for youth ages 13 through 17.

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The City also provides tiny tot programs for children from birth through age 6 that focus on early childhood development and parent participation. Programs include ballet and tap, parent-and-me gymnastics, and tiny tot gymnastics, which support motor skill development, coordination, and early socialization.

The Gardena Youth Commission supports youth engagement and leadership development by serving in an advisory role to the City Council. Comprised of five (5) City Council-appointed members and five (5) at-large members, the Commission evaluates youth-related and community issues and provides recommendations to help inform policies and programs affecting young residents.

Adult

The City of Gardena offers a variety of classes and programs for adults, including enrichment, fitness, and dance programs. The City also offers a Therapeutic Recreation Program (TRP) designed to meet the needs of individuals with developmental disabilities. The TRP provides a supportive environment that promotes socialization, skill development, and inclusion for all participants.



Mas Fukai Park Basketball Court

Libraries

While not classified as formal recreation facilities, the City provides access to two public libraries: the Masao W. Satow Library and the Gardena Mayme Dear Library. Both facilities include public parking and function as important community resources. The libraries support lifelong learning by offering early literacy programs, reading and homework assistance for children and teens, public computer access, and a variety of additional educational and community services.

Parkland and Recreation Analysis

The City of Gardena provides a diverse range of park spaces for residents, varying in size and function. Gardena's park system includes a broad array of amenities, such as baseball, soccer fields, basketball courts, tennis courts, handball courts, futsal courts, skate parks, swimming pools, playgrounds, picnic areas with shelters, walking paths, sidewalks, and specialty features such as horseshoe pits. Collectively, these amenities support both active and passive recreation, recreational programming, community gatherings, and fitness opportunities for residents of all ages.

Park facilities in Gardena range from small neighborhood parkettes of approximately 0.2 acres to large community parks spanning up to 18.7 acres, offering spaces that support a variety of recreational uses and activities.

As shown in **Figure 1**, existing parks are generally distributed throughout the City, providing varying levels of access across neighborhoods. However, despite the diversity of amenities and park types, the overall supply of parkland in Gardena remains limited when considered in relation to the City's population density and fully built-out urban environment.



Fitness Equipment at Rowley Memorial Park



Skatepark at Arthur Lee Johnson Memorial Park

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Park Gap Analysis

Proximity to parks is not merely a matter of convenience, but plays an important role in improving air quality, encouraging physical activity, and fostering healthier, more connected communities. One key measure used to evaluate park access is the percentage of residents living within a quarter to a half mile of a park, which generally corresponds to a 5- to 10-minute walk. This metric helps identify neighborhoods that are well served by existing parks, as well as areas where access to green space is limited, informing more equitable and strategic park planning decisions. **Figure 3** shows access to parks and recreation facilities within a one-quarter-mile and one-half-mile walkshed. Overall, park access is relatively strong throughout the City. According to ParkServe, a database managed by the Trust for Public Land, 73 percent of Gardena residents live within a half mile of a park. This percentage exceeds the national average for urban cities and towns in the United States (57 percent) and is also higher than the City of Los Angeles average (67 percent).

Although parks are generally distributed throughout the City, areas with more limited access are primarily located along Gardena's outer boundaries, including neighborhoods south of West 134th Street and east of West 139th Street. Portions of the City's northwest boundary are located near parks outside Gardena's municipal limits; however, these areas are not considered to have direct park access within this analysis.

Per Capita Park Space Analysis

In addition to physical access, the amount of park space available to residents is a critical factor in evaluating the adequacy of the City's park system. A per capita park space analysis is a standard planning measure used to assess how much parkland or open space is available per resident within a community. Gardena currently provides approximately 0.83 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents, compared to a Los Angeles County average of 3.3 acres per 1,000 residents. According to 2025 data from the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), the national standard for parkland provision is 10.2 acres per 1,000 residents, equating to roughly 98 people served per acre of park space. In contrast, each acre of parkland in Gardena serves approximately 1,200 residents, highlighting the significant demand placed on existing park resources.

The NRPA standard of 10.2 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents reflects communities that are generally larger in scale and less fully built out, making this benchmark less attainable for denser and smaller urban cities such as Gardena. Recognizing these constraints, the Gardena General Plan establishes a more context-sensitive goal of providing 3 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. To meet this standard, the City would require approximately 133.7 additional acres of parkland, bringing the total to approximately 185 acres citywide. Recent park property acquisitions, discussed in the Planned Parks section, along with opportunities for joint use agreements with public school athletic fields, represent key strategies for incrementally increasing park acreage and improving recreational access throughout the City.

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Barriers to Park Access

Despite relatively widespread park distribution, not all residents experience equal access to safe and comfortable park spaces. Environmental conditions such as urban heat island effects, limited tree canopy, and high exposure to air pollution can create significant barriers to park use, particularly in neighborhoods facing greater environmental and social burdens. Elevated temperatures and insufficient shade can make parks and walking routes uncomfortable or unusable during warmer months, while poor air quality further discourages outdoor activity. Together, these factors reduce the usability of existing parks and highlight the need for targeted strategies that address heat, shade, and environmental comfort as part of equitable park and open space planning.

Urban Heat Island

Surface materials play a significant role in shaping local temperature conditions. Dark, impervious materials such as asphalt and concrete absorb substantial amounts of solar radiation during the day and slowly release that heat into the surrounding environment, leading to higher surface and ambient air temperatures. These effects are most pronounced during the summer months and in areas with dense development and limited shade.

In contrast, landscaped surfaces, including trees, shrubs, and groundcover, provide important cooling benefits. Vegetation reduces heat buildup by shading hard surfaces and cooling the surrounding air through evapotranspiration, a natural process by which plants release moisture. Other surface treatments, such as bare soil or lighter-colored paving materials, influence temperatures differently depending on their reflectivity and moisture content. Highly reflective surfaces tend to remain cooler by deflecting solar radiation, while moist soils can offer limited cooling through evaporation.

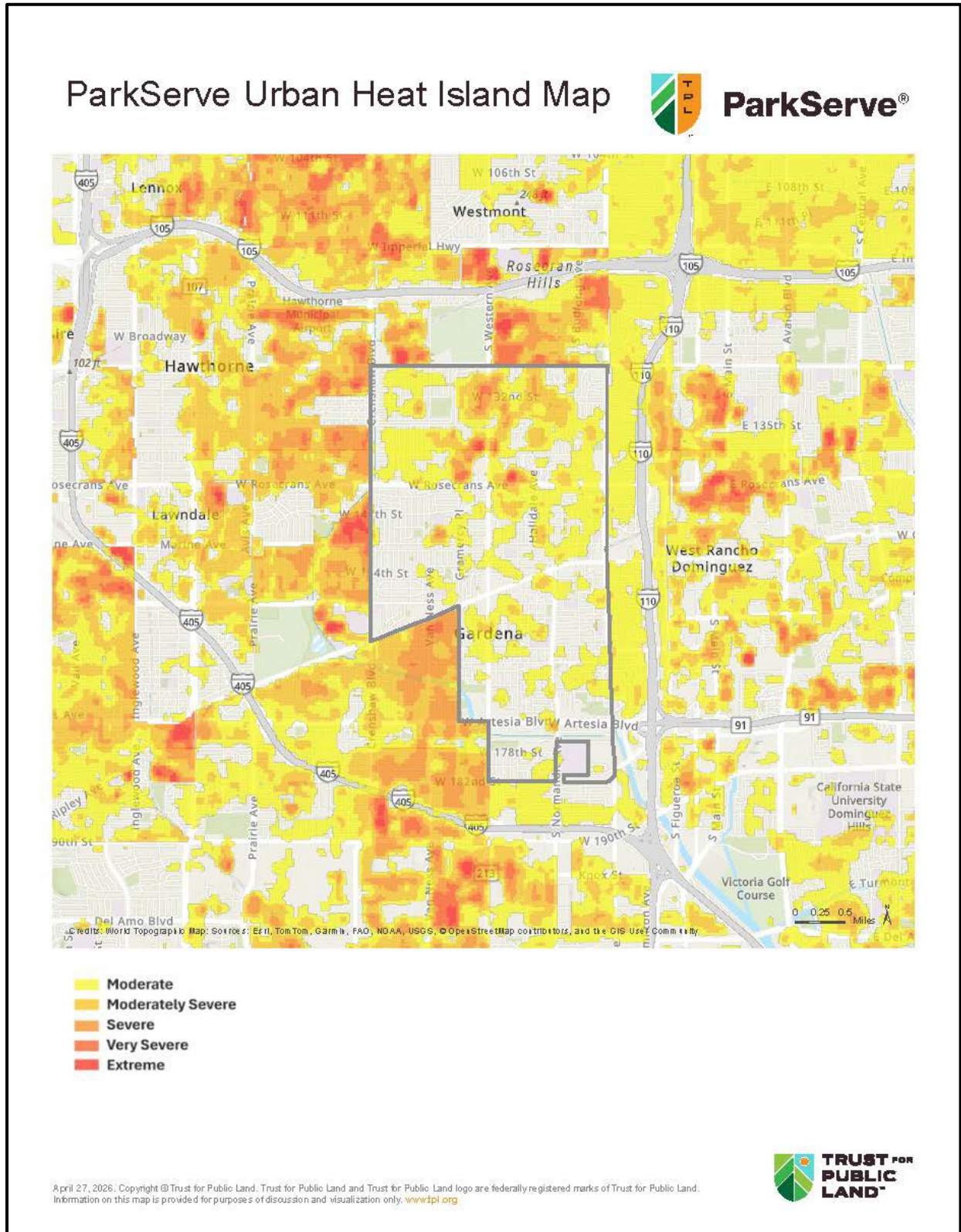
According to ParkServe, the City generally experiences moderate levels of the UHI effects. As shown in **Figure 4**, areas along Western Avenue and West Rosecrans Avenue exhibit more moderately severe to severe heat island conditions. These elevated heat impacts are largely concentrated in corridors characterized by commercial and industrial land uses, which tend to have higher levels of impervious surfaces and limited tree canopy. In contrast, these areas contain relatively fewer residential neighborhoods, suggesting that the most severe heat impacts occur where development intensity is higher and shade-providing vegetation is more limited.

Compared with neighboring communities, severe UHI conditions appear to be less widespread in Gardena. This pattern may reflect differences in development intensity, landscaping, green space, and tree canopy coverage.

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Figure 4: Urban Heat Islands in Gardena



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Urban Tree Canopy

Expanding and maintaining an urban tree canopy is one of the most effective strategies for reducing UHI impacts. Urban tree canopy describes the amount of shade provided by trees across the city. Tree canopies help cool neighborhoods by shading streets, sidewalks, and buildings and by reducing the amount of heat absorbed by paved surfaces. Cities with a higher percentage of tree cover are generally cooler and more comfortable for outdoor activity. Increased tree canopy coverage also reduces heat-related health risks, particularly during extreme heat events when vulnerable populations are most susceptible. According to the U.S. Geological Survey California Urban Tree Canopy Viewer, the City of Gardena had approximately 4.6 percent tree canopy coverage in 2022 (**Figure 5**). This reflects a 0.8 percentage-point decrease from 5.4 percent in 2018. The decrease was primarily attributable to tree loss associated with weather-related impacts and disease.

Establishing a realistic urban tree canopy goal is an important step toward reducing heat exposure, strengthening park access, and enhancing overall community well-being. The ability to expand tree canopy coverage varies based on factors such as land use patterns, development intensity, and local climate conditions. In less developed communities, tree canopy coverage can reach higher levels, while more urbanized cities with drier climates require more moderate and sustainable targets. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, a long-term urban tree canopy target of approximately 15 to 20 percent is generally considered achievable for dense urban communities in dry climate zones such as Gardena. Achieving this goal will require both long-term planning and thoughtful project-level implementation. This also aligns with the State's goal of increasing average tree canopy in the State by 10 percent by 2035 ((Assembly Bill 2251 (2022)).

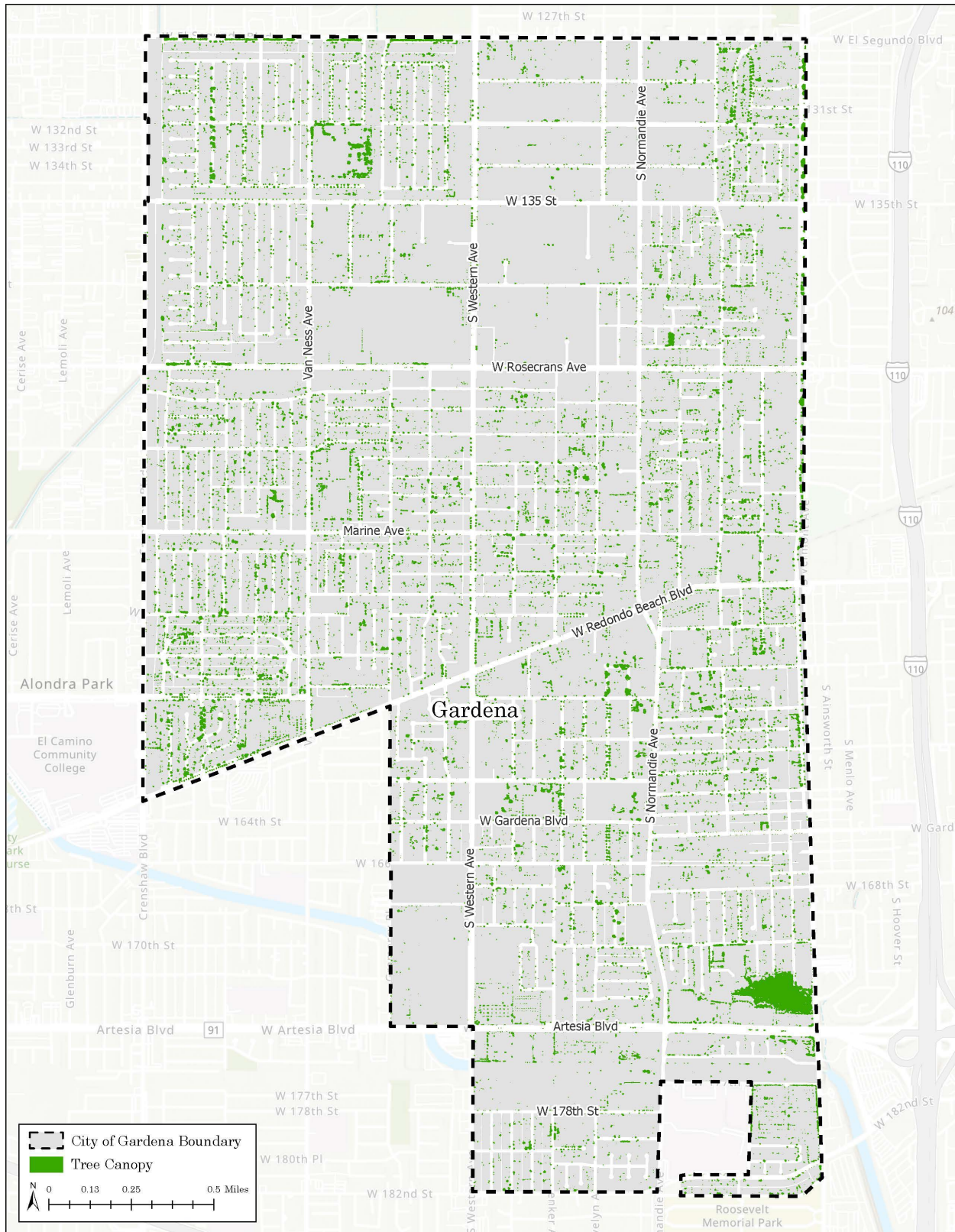
New development and redevelopment projects should incorporate green space, shade trees, and landscaping features, especially in residential neighborhoods, that reduce surface temperatures, minimize heat retention, and contribute to a cooler and more comfortable community.



Existing Tree Canopy at Paul Rowley Memorial Park

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Figure 5: Gardena Tree Canopy



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Disadvantaged Communities and Park Accessibility

Senate Bill 1425 requires cities to address equitable access to parks, open spaces, and recreational facilities as part of general plan updates. In response, the City of Gardena is committed to ensuring that all residents, regardless of age, ability, socioeconomic status, or demographic background, have fair and meaningful access to parks and recreational opportunities.

The State uses CalEnviroScreen to identify and prioritize disadvantaged communities for environmental justice investments, climate funding, and public health resources. For purposes of SB 1000, disadvantaged communities may include census tracts with scores in the top 25 percent statewide based on pollution burden and socioeconomic vulnerability.

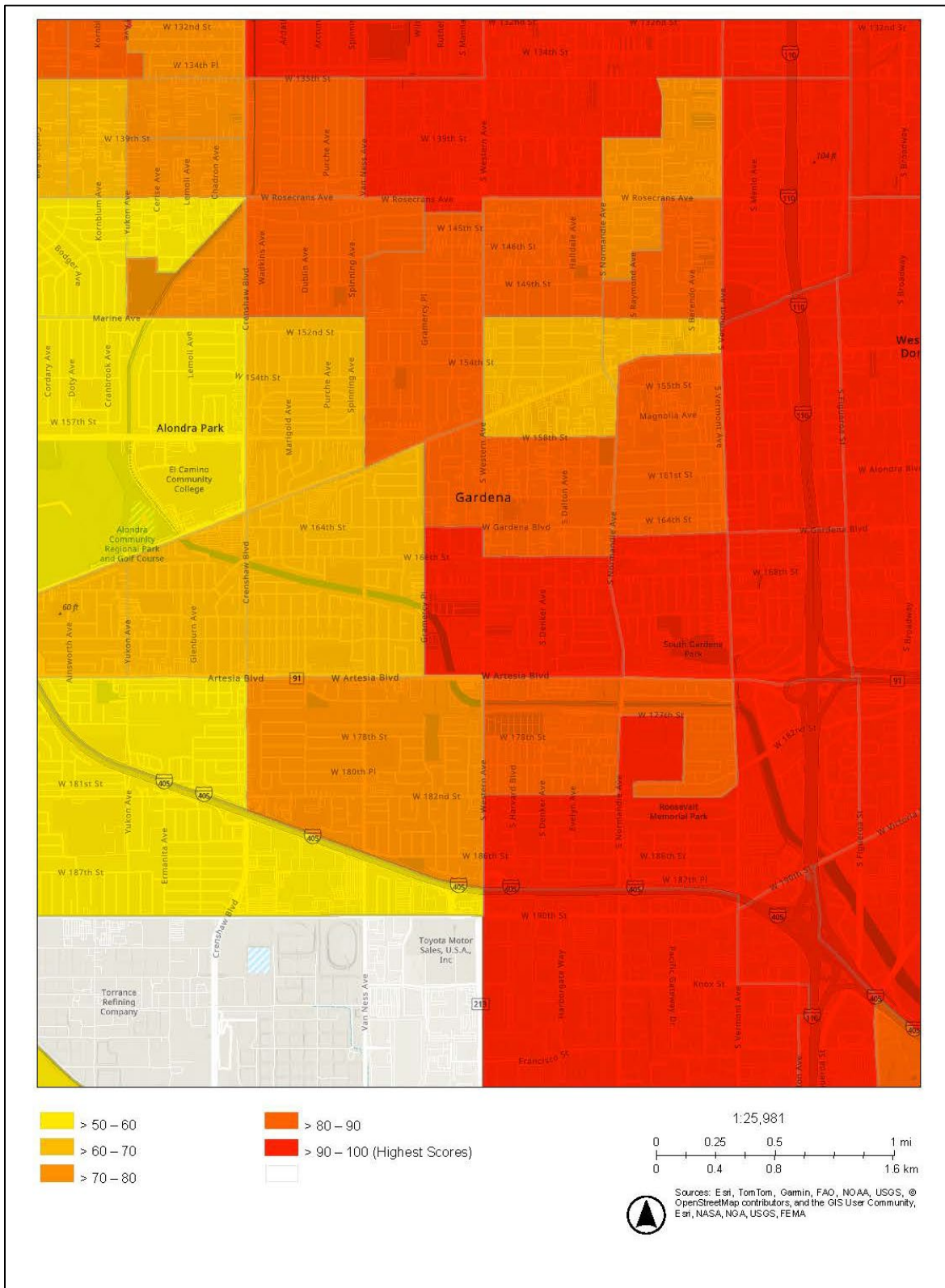
Figure 6 illustrates the relationship between disadvantaged communities and park accessibility in Gardena, as drawn from CalEnviroScreen 5.0 data. These data indicates that census tracts within Gardena rank within the 60th to 100th percentile statewide, with much of the City's northern and eastern neighborhoods falling within the 80th to 100th percentile range. These higher percentile rankings reflect comparatively greater cumulative environmental pollution burdens and population vulnerabilities, including exposure to air pollution, proximity to major transportation corridors, and socioeconomic stressors. Residents in areas with higher CalEnviroScreen 5.0 scores may experience greater limitations on outdoor activity due to poor air quality, limited tree canopy, urban heat, and reduced access to safe and comfortable recreational spaces. Higher exposure to air pollution, particularly near major transportation corridors, is associated with increased rates of respiratory and cardiovascular conditions. Noise, traffic, and limited access to natural environments can also contribute to anxiety, fatigue, and reduced mental well-being. Together, these environmental burdens can make outdoor spaces less usable and less inviting, especially during warmer months.

In the context of open space planning, these conditions highlight the importance of parks and open spaces as essential community assets that support public health, environmental resilience, and overall quality of life. Equitable access to well-designed, shaded, and accessible parks is especially important in neighborhoods that experience greater environmental and social burdens. Through strategic open space planning and targeted investment, the City can help address these disparities by prioritizing improvements and new park amenities in higher-need areas. Efforts such as expanding tree canopy, enhancing pedestrian connectivity, and increasing access to both passive and active recreational opportunities can help reduce environmental stressors, encourage physical activity, and support overall community well-being.

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Figure 6: CalEnviroScreen 5.0 Disadvantaged Community Rankings



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Plan Organization

This Conservation Plan includes goals and policies addressing the following areas:

1. Park Maintenance and Recreation Facilities
2. Parkland Acquisition and Open Space Opportunities
3. Equitable Park Access and Inclusive Recreation

Goals and Policies

1. Park Maintenance and Recreation Facilities

OS Goal 1 Maintain and upgrade the existing parks and recreation facilities to meet the needs of all residents.

Policies

OS 1.1: Continue to maintain and improve City parks, recreational facilities, trails, and amenities to provide clean, functional, safe, attractive, and well-maintained recreation environments.

- Regularly evaluate the condition of playgrounds, athletic facilities, walking paths, lighting, restrooms, seating, drinking fountains, landscaping, and other park amenities.
- Prioritize rehabilitation or replacement of aging or deteriorated facilities through the Capital Improvement Program and Parks and Recreation Master Plan. Consider lifecycle costs, durability, water use, and maintenance requirements when selecting new park facilities and materials.

OS 1.2: Continue to encourage and seek out joint-use agreements with public and private schools to use schoolyard playgrounds and ball fields for public parks during non-school hours.

- Prioritize shared use of school playgrounds, fields, courts, gymnasiums, and other recreational facilities in areas with limited access to City parks.
- Explore agreements addressing operating hours, maintenance responsibilities, security, liability, programming, and facility improvements.
- Consider joint funding opportunities for improvements that provide both school and community recreational benefits.

OS 1.3: Continue to encourage joint recreational use with Los Angeles County.

- Coordinate with Los Angeles County to provide shared recreational facilities, programs, and open space opportunities that benefit the community.

OS 1.4: Periodically evaluate and update recreational programs to respond to changing demographics, abilities, interests, and community needs.

- Provide a balance of youth, adult, senior, multigenerational, cultural, fitness, environmental, and community-based programming.

Open Space Plan

Adopted Month Year

- Expand inclusive and adaptive recreational opportunities for persons with disabilities and neurodivergent participants.
- Consider expanded nature-based and environmental education programs, fitness classes, arts and cultural activities, and community events based on demonstrated community interest.
- Partner with schools, nonprofit organizations, cultural organizations, and community groups to expand programming opportunities.
- Periodically review facility use policies and programming practices to respond to changing recreational needs and community demand..

OS 1.5: Promote safe and welcoming parks, recreation facilities, trails, and routes to parks through appropriate lighting, visibility, maintenance, access improvements, and crime prevention through environmental design principles.

- Evaluate lighting at park entrances, pathways, parking areas, recreation facilities, and routes serving parks.
- Improve visibility through appropriate landscaping, lighting, and facility design.
- Coordinate park safety improvements with pedestrian crossing, sidewalk, bicycle, and traffic-calming improvements.
- Consider community-reported safety concerns when prioritizing park and access improvements.
- Evaluate parking availability and demand at existing parks and identify opportunities to improve parking access, efficiency, and management, particularly at parks experiencing parking shortages.

OS 1.6: Provide adequate parking for all parks and recreation facilities in the City.

OS 1.7: Continue to support adequate funding and capital improvement planning for the ongoing maintenance and rehabilitation of City facilities.

OS 1.8: Continue to promote creative financing mechanisms to fund the development and maintenance of parks and recreation facilities and programs, such as State grant funds, park in-lieu fees, and public-private partnerships.

OS 1.9: Support improvement and modernization of recreation facilities, community centers, aquatic facilities, cultural and educational spaces, and event venues to accommodate evolving recreational, cultural, educational, and multigenerational community needs.

- Explore opportunities for flexible multipurpose spaces capable of supporting recreation, arts, cultural events, education, and community gatherings.

- Coordinate programming with libraries, schools, cultural organizations, and community groups.
- Consider multigenerational uses when planning new or renovated community facilities.

2. Parkland Acquisition and Open Space Opportunities

OS Goal 2 Increase the City's supply and quality of parkland, open space, and recreational programs.

Policies

OS 2.1: Identify and maintain an inventory of vacant, underutilized, and other potential sites with potential for future purchase, donation, consolidation, or future potential development as parks, particularly in the northeast quadrant of the City.

OS 2.2: Encourage opportunities to use suitable utility easements, rights-of-way, and other underutilized public spaces for parks, trails, bicycle and pedestrian connections, and other recreational uses, where feasible.

- Identify underutilized public properties, rights-of-way, easements, and corridors that may provide opportunities for recreational or open space use.
- Coordinate with property owners, utility providers, public agencies, and other partners to evaluate potential shared or recreational uses.
- Prioritize opportunities that improve connections between neighborhoods, parks, schools, trails, and other community destinations.
- Consider site constraints, safety, accessibility, operations, maintenance, and compatibility with the primary function of the property or corridor.
- Pursue partnerships and available funding opportunities to support implementation.

OS 2.3: Pursue land acquisition, partnerships, redevelopment opportunities, joint-use facilities, and innovative open space strategies to expand recreational opportunities and make progress toward the City's long-term parkland provision goal of 3 acres per 1,000 residents.

- Evaluate vacant, underutilized, remnant, and publicly owned parcels for potential park and open space use.
- Consider pocket parks, parkettes, plazas, linear parks, community gardens, and other small-scale open spaces where traditional parks are infeasible.

Open Space Plan

Adopted Month Year

- Explore opportunities to expand existing parks through acquisition of adjacent parcels.
- Evaluate utility corridors, drainage channels, excess rights-of-way, and other linear spaces for recreational or open space use where feasible.
- Consider partnerships with schools, religious institutions, nonprofits, private developments, and other property owners.
- Prioritize acquisitions that close identified park-access gaps.

OS 2.4: Support opportunities for community gardens, urban agriculture, and other community-based green spaces within parks and on suitable public, institutional, or underutilized properties.

- Identify suitable City-owned or underutilized sites for community gardens.
- Consider community gardens as a component of new parks, park expansions, and joint-use facilities.
- Partner with schools and community organizations for garden management and educational programming.
- Design and manage community gardens consistent with applicable Conservation Plan policies for water efficiency, native landscaping, and pollinator support.

OS 2.5: Support maintenance, enhancement, and strategic expansion of the Laguna Dominguez Trail corridor as a recreational, mobility, and open space resource.

- Improve pedestrian and bicycle access to the trail from surrounding neighborhoods.
- Explore opportunities for landscaping, shade, seating, wayfinding, and other user-oriented improvements along the corridor, consistent with Conservation Plan policies for native landscaping and habitat enhancement.
- Coordinate with responsible regional agencies and adjacent jurisdictions regarding trail continuity and channel improvements.
- Evaluate opportunities to extend or connect the trail to parks, schools, community facilities, and regional bicycle routes.

OS 2.6: Support the Gardena Willows Wetland Preserve as a natural open space, environmental education destination, and passive recreational asset consistent with the natural resource protection policies of the Conservation Plan.

- Explore expanded public access, operating days, and hours where compatible with habitat protection and operational capacity.
- Explore opportunities for a nature or environmental education center.

- Support environmental education, interpretation, and nature-based programming associated with the Preserve.
- Support appropriate connections between the Preserve, Arthur Lee Johnson Memorial Park, and the surrounding pedestrian and bicycle network.

3. Equitable Park Access and Inclusive Recreation

OS Goal 3 Ensure equitable and safe access to parks, open space, recreation facilities, and programs for all residents, regardless of age, ability, income, or neighborhood.

Policies

OS 3.1: Maintain and periodically update the Parks and Facilities Master Plan to inventory existing facilities, evaluate community needs, establish level-of-service objectives, identify park acquisition and improvement opportunities, and guide future park, recreation facility, and program investments.

- Evaluate the condition, capacity, accessibility, and distribution of existing parks, recreation facilities, and amenities.
- Identify geographic gaps in park access and prioritize underserved neighborhoods for new parks, park expansion, joint-use opportunities, and access improvements.
- Establish priorities for rehabilitation and modernization of existing parks and recreation facilities, including walking paths, shade, seating, drinking water, restrooms, lighting, playgrounds, fitness facilities, and other community-serving amenities.
- Evaluate opportunities for acquisition of vacant or underutilized properties, expansion of existing parks, pocket parks, linear parks, joint-use facilities, and other innovative approaches to increasing recreational open space.
- Incorporate community needs, demographic trends, environmental justice considerations, heat exposure, tree canopy, accessibility, and public input when establishing investment priorities.
- Identify short-, medium-, and long-term improvements, potential funding sources, implementation priorities, responsible departments or partners, and anticipated implementation timeframes.

Open Space Plan

Adopted Month Year

- Evaluate demand and appropriate locations for specialized recreational amenities such as dog parks, fitness areas, walking loops, courts, fields, and other community-requested facilities.

OS 3.2: Prioritize park improvements, recreational investments, new open space opportunities, and access improvements in areas with limited park access, greater environmental burdens, elevated heat exposure, or other identified community needs.

- Use park walkshed analysis, CalEnviroScreen, urban heat data, tree canopy data, demographic information, and community input to identify priority investment areas.
- Prioritize opportunities that close gaps in the City's quarter-mile and half-mile park access network.
- Use the Parks and Facilities Master Plan and other planning efforts to periodically update park-access analysis and investment priorities.

OS 3.3: Improve pedestrian and bicycle connections between neighborhoods, parks, schools, recreation facilities, and regional open space resources.

- Prioritize safer street crossings along routes to parks.
- Improve lighting along pedestrian and bicycle routes serving parks and recreational facilities.
- Evaluate traffic-calming measures near parks and community facilities.
- Address sidewalk gaps, accessibility barriers, and inadequate pedestrian facilities.
- Improve bicycle connections between parks and the City's existing and planned bicycle network.
- Coordinate improvements with the Circulation Element and capital improvement planning.

OS 3.4: Incorporate universal and inclusive design principles into new and renovated parks, recreation facilities, playgrounds, trails, and amenities to serve residents of varying ages, abilities, and sensory and mobility needs.

- Provide accessible routes connecting parking, sidewalks, recreation facilities, playgrounds, restrooms, and other amenities.
- Consider inclusive playground and fitness equipment serving a range of physical and sensory abilities.
- Provide seating and rest areas along walking routes.

- Consider the needs of children, seniors, persons with disabilities, and caregivers when designing facilities.

OS 3.5: Use community needs assessments, environmental justice considerations, public health indicators, and community engagement to inform park planning, facility investments, and recreational programming.

OS 3.6: Provide shade, seating, drinking water, restrooms, walking paths, picnic facilities, and other supportive amenities within parks and recreation areas based on park function, community needs, and available resources.

- Prioritize shade along playgrounds, walking loops, seating areas, gathering spaces, and other high-use locations.
- Provide drinking water and seating at appropriate intervals along walking and recreational routes.
- Evaluate opportunities to add or improve restrooms at heavily used parks.
- Consider walking loops and fitness stations when renovating larger parks.