

6 Parks & Open Space Plan

Natural resources, environmental features, parks, and open space are all important components of St. Charles and contribute significantly to the overall quality of life for City residents. Public parks and open space provide places for residents and visitors to recreate and enjoy nature, are integral to the health and well being of the community, and celebrate the City’s history and personality. Neighborhood parks allow children a place to play without being driven and provide the community a nearby, central gathering place for picnics, sports, and other activities. The Fox River, a focal point for the entire City, ties the whole system together.

St. Charles has many significant environmental features such as streams, wetlands, and wooded areas that add significantly to the character of the community. These elements that occur without human intervention play as vital a role as designed and cultivated city parks. The City recognizes the value of these assets and seeks to protect and enhance them. Sustainable techniques for building, maintaining, and operating all aspects of the City are present throughout of the Comprehensive Plan, but the Parks and Open Space Plan proposes particular recommendations for sustainable, “green” initiatives.

This chapter presents the policies and recommendations pertaining to parks and open space which generally seek to preserve important and sensitive environmental features. A primary goal of the Parks and Open Space Plan is to provide adequate open space and recreation to the community, indicating instances when acquiring and developing park sites may be necessary. In addition, the plan aims to improve public access to these areas.



Amid this beautiful setting, it is only natural that recreation will flourish, and you, my last-born, shall be the guardian of this natural recreation expression of man living in these surroundings.

-Legend of the Fours Sons of Charlemagne

St. Charles Park Sites

St. Charles’s parks are among the City’s most cherished assets. Providing space to recreate and reflect, the parks are popular destinations and landmarks for many residents. The St. Charles Park District is a leader in the creation and maintenance of excellent park facilities, one of the many assets that contribute to an outstanding quality of life in the City. The park system includes playgrounds, sports fields, aquatic facilities, trails, passive spaces, and natural areas. The Park District has expertise in both developed park facilities and in the protection, restoration, and stewardship of natural areas, and the park system is replete with both.

At the time this Plan was prepared, the Park District did not plan on adding any new facilities but did plan on improving several parks and playgrounds. The biggest improvement planned is a community/athletic center complete with gymnasiums, recreation program rooms and possible indoor playing fields.

The following is a summary of the most prominent park spaces with a brief description of their amenities. For a more detailed, comprehensive listing of the parks in St. Charles, please consult the St. Charles Park District Comprehensive Master Plan.



Pottawattomie Park

This park is one of the most popular within the City of St. Charles, boasting 92 acres of recreational amenities including a historic 9-hole golf course, a miniature golf course, Swanson Pool, equipment and pavilion rentals, and extensive programming. The park sits on the banks of the Fox River north of downtown and within close proximity to City Hall and the other downtown civic uses.



James O. Breen Park

This 348 acre complex provides 18 soccer fields, rugby and football fields, a dog park, disc golf, the Hickory Knolls Discovery Center, and Otter Cove Aquatic Park. The park is located at the Corner of Campton Hills and Peck Roads.



East Side Sports Complex

This 82 acre park has softball/baseball fields, a soccer field, 10 multipurpose playfields, a skate park, tennis and sand volleyball courts, basketball courts, playgrounds, a dog park, a fishing pond with pier, and other amenities. The park is located on Legacy Boulevard east of Kirk Road about one mile south of Rt. 64.



Baker Memorial Park and Lincoln Park

Each of these classic downtown parks occupies a city block and provides a break from Downtown’s urbanized areas. They serve as meeting spaces and places where residents can spend leisure time. While small compared to the large community parks in the City, these mini-parks contribute substantially to the sense of place in Downtown St. Charles.



Mount St. Mary Park

Mount St. Mary Park, a riverfront park that includes a playground, tennis and basketball courts, a shelter, and other amenities is significant because it is located in close proximity to the Downtown area and hosts civic events such as a yearly art exhibition. It is within walking distance of the First Street development and serves as an important recreational amenity for Downtown residents and visitors.



Leroy Oaks Forest Preserve

Leroy Oaks Forest Preserve, with its variety of natural amenities, includes a creek that flows year-round, 130 feet of elevation difference throughout the park, an original and restored prairie land, and horse trails. The Preserve is also the trailhead for the Great Western Trail. The property is owned and managed by the Kane County Forest Preserve District.



Acquisition and Expansion Strategy

The St. Charles Park District Master Plan lays out a vision for the future of the Park District and also describes the need and desire for future acquisition. It is the policy of the St. Charles Park District to continue to aggressively acquire land for future park space and preservation. The Park District will accomplish this expansion via acquisition of large parcels of land, riverfront and natural areas, cooperation with developers, and intergovernmental cooperation.

The Park District has identified the following areas for acquisition:

- » Sites in the City: 1) Expansion of Delnor Woods Park, located on Fifth Avenue northeast of Downtown. The expansion was acquired by the Park District in 2012; and 2) Expansion of the James O. Breen Community Park, which will involve working with the Illinois Department of Corrections to acquire additional property.
- » Potential Land-Cash donation sites in connection with development: 1) Heisley Property on Burr Road north of Dean Street; and 2)The former Settlements of LaFox site on IL Route 38 at Brundige Road.
- » Kane County Forest Preserve District acquisitions, including: 1) Heisley Property; 2)Wildrose Girl Scout Camp; and 3) Privately owned wetland areas along Ferson Creek.

Recommendations

With an understanding of the role played by parks and open space throughout St. Charles, the City should continue to work closely with the Park District in implementing its Comprehensive Master Plan. This may involve actions such as coordinating the selection of new park locations and facilities, offering incentives to developers to provide open space, developing joint programming, assisting in locating funding sources, and others. The City should also ensure that all current and future parks are well connected by roadways, walking and bicycle paths, and transit to the rest of the City.



The Fox River

The Fox River is the symbolic and physical “heart” of St. Charles, bisecting Downtown and anchoring the City overall. One of St. Charles’ most prominent features, it provides recreation, scenery, and a strong sense of place. The river has played an important role throughout the City’s history, from its founding to today. An iconic feature in both the scenic vistas Downtown and the minds of residents, the river warrants special attention as a key environmental feature.

Recommendations

To protect and enhance the appearance, health, and longevity of the Fox River, the City should regulate riverside development to minimize environmental impacts, balance the need to develop while maintaining access and views, and avoid uses that do not fit with existing development and that would work against the character desired for riverfront areas. The City should bolster and implement a long-term green infrastructure plan that promotes slowing, cooling, cleansing, and infiltration to the degree possible of all rainwater before discharge to the Fox, which will improve water quality, aquatic habitat, and beauty. Also, the City should work to improve access to the river through open space and trails. The Fox River is a special opportunity to strengthen Downtown as a destination for visitors and residents alike. Nearby seasonal events, aesthetic enhancements like illuminating the dam, and retaining the image of the river in promotional efforts will reinforce the Fox River as the anchor of St. Charles.

Conservation

Surface Water

Besides the Fox River, two tributaries, Ferson and Norton Creeks, contribute to the natural beauty of St. Charles. In addition to the rivers, creeks, and streams, St. Charles has a number of lakes and ponds—most of which are man-made detention ponds created for the management of storm water.

Wetlands

Natural wetlands are an essential element of St. Charles/ Kane County landscape ecology. When properly protected and managed, wetlands are places of great biodiversity and provide habitat for a wide array of native plant species, birds, beneficial insects, and other fauna. St. Charles’ wetlands are one of its most beautiful natural amenities. Most of the wetlands along the Fox River are protected through public ownership, but many are not protected and are subject to redevelopment, thus eliminating their contributions to the biodiversity, pristine beauty, and natural heritage of the community.

Flood Plain

Because St. Charles has a major river and other natural waterways flowing through it, flooding is a concern. The Federal Emergency Management Service has designated the area sitting within the 100 year floodplain as protected in order to promote public safety while also preserving the natural environment adjacent to bodies of water. The implications for any planning effort are that development must take the floodplain into account and all recommendations should reflect this requirement.

Vegetation

Prior to its settlement, the St. Charles area was dominated by ecologically rich prairies, fens, sedge meadows, and open-grown woodlands. Today, while most of these natural landscapes have been cleared and replaced with agricultural and development land uses, there are still a few remaining pockets of remnant native landscape. Places like Leroy Oakes Forest Preserve, Ferson Creek, Norris Woods, and Arthur Andersen Woods protect these areas for current and future generations. Many of these forest preserves abut or even exist within residential communities in the City, providing a unique sense of coexistence and harmony with nature within a city environment. This is one of St. Charles’ most unique and valuable attributes and should be highlighted and strengthened.

Alternative Energy

Contributing to economic and environmental sustainability, utilizing green and alternative energy sources can address multiple mission areas simultaneously. Methods for generating alternative energy that may be viable in St. Charles include wind, solar, and geothermal. Even approaches short of novel energy systems, such as energy conserving construction methods for new buildings and renovations, can still have meaningful contributions on reducing environmental impacts.



Recommendations

Working with the Kane County Forest Preserve District, the Park District, other organizations, and local stakeholders, the City should continue to preserve, protect, and improve streams, wetlands, and water bodies within the community. In an effort to protect the watershed, waterways, and other aquatic resources, the City should work to minimize impervious surfaces to the degree practical, and to implement integrated green infrastructure practices including permeable pavement systems, bio-retention, and other best practices. The City should encourage, demonstrate, and incentivize sustainable water management measures. The City should also encourage the use of native/naturalized landscape systems when designed, installed, and managed properly as an alternative to turfgrass in certain passive landscape areas.

Some areas of the community, most notably Tyler Road at the 7th Avenue Creek and Main Street at 8th and 9th Avenue, are prone to flooding during significant storm events, creating safety concerns and causing property damage. Measures the City can take to improve conditions include: prohibiting development in existing floodplains, flood prone, or wet areas; reclaiming filled floodplains where practicable; integrating infiltration-based green infrastructure practices; and prioritizing areas prone to flooding that have the most negative impact. Consider and evaluate regional strategies that integrate a range of solutions (rather than an “end-of-the-pipe” approach).

The City should promote increased energy efficiency for both new construction and upgrades to existing structures. The City should consider the creation of an environmental policy which deals specifically with energy-efficient building design and construction, outlining the need to upgrade the energy

efficiency of existing buildings. Part of this policy should be to improve programs assuring energy efficiency in new construction.

The City should encourage residents and businesses to use alternative energy sources, such as solar, wind, and other renewable energy sources. To encourage alternative energy use, the City should educate the public regarding the benefits of alternative energy and work with developers to include these energy sources in their projects.

Education and Involvement

Protecting the open space and environmental features cannot be based on the efforts of government alone. The community, already invested in so many other aspects of life in St. Charles, needs to be actively involved in making sure the City functions as a sustainable place to live and work. Keeping the public and officials current on the latest trends and techniques being used to promote sustainability will assist the City in future decision making.

Recommendations

The City should take a leadership role in coordinating educational opportunities for the public, as well as elected and appointed officials about the importance of sustainability. The City should also host educational sessions such as training seminars and workshops, and provide educational materials.

- 1 Riverbend Park
- 2 Royal Hawk Country Club
- 3 Primrose Farm Park
- 4 River's Edge Park
- 5 Red Gate Park
- 6 Fox River Bluff West
- 7 Norton Woods
- 8 Redgate Misc. Lot
- 9 Arthur Andersen
- 10 Royal Fox Country Club
- 11 Leroy Oakes
- 12 Ferson Creek Fen
- 13 Ferson Creek Park
- 14 Norris Woods
- 15 St. Charles Country Club
- 16 Dick Williams Wetland
- 17 Persimmon Woods
- 18 Hunt Club Wetland
- 19 Aintree Park
- 20 Fox Chase Park
- 21 Dunham Pond
- 22 Majestic Oaks Park
- 23 Majestic Oaks Playground
- 24 Majestic Oaks Wetland
- 25 Kingswood Wetland
- 26 Charlemagne Park
- 27 Pheasant Run Resort
- 28 Surrey Hill Park
- 29 Hunt Club Park
- 30 Steeplechase Detention
- 31 Delnor Woods Park
- 32 Pottawatomie Park
- 33 Boy Scout Island
- 34 Timber Trails Park
- 35 Renaux Manor Park
- 36 Artesian Springs Park
- 37 James O. Breen Comm. Park
- 38 Harvest Hills Park
- 39 Fairview Park
- 40 Davis Park
- 41 Kehoe Park
- 42 Lincoln Park
- 43 Baker Field Park
- 44 Moody Park
- 45 Baker Memorial Park
- 46 Hazeltine Park
- 47 Mount Saint Mary Park
- 48 Langum Park
- 49 Riverbank Park
- 50 Riverside Park
- 51 Cambridge Park
- 52 Regole
- 53 East Side Sports Complex
- 54 Rotary Park
- 55 Belgium Town Park
- 56 Girl Scout Camp
- 57 Pottawatomie Golf Course

Open Space Legend

- Existing Park/Future Open Space
- Kane County Forest Preserve
- Golf Course
- Detention/HOA

Map Legend

- St. Charles Corporate Limits
- Railroad
- Fox River/Waterbody
- Creek/Stream

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